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# Singing Schools in Southcentral Kentucky

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Beisswenger,  
Donald Andrew  
1985



SINGING SCHOOLS IN SOUTHCENTRAL KENTUCKY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the

Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Donald Andrew Beisswenger

December 1985

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SINGING SCHOOLS IN SOUTHCENTRAL KENTUCKY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . .	v
ABSTRACT . . . . .	vii
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I. THE PERFORMANCE OF POPULAR RELIGIOUS MUSIC . . . . .	9
Revivalism, Camp Meetings, and Rural Church Events Singing Conventions	
II. SONGBOOK PUBLISHERS: A TRADITION OF NEWNESS . . . . .	43
James D. Vaughan Music Publisher Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company	
III. SINGING SCHOOL STYLES . . . . .	68
C. E. DeWeese's Singing School at the Pine Grove United Baptist Church Organizing the Singing Schools Social and Religious Aspects Teaching Methods	
IV. SINGING SCHOOL TEACHERS: THREE PROFILES . . . . .	106
Chester Whitescarver Clarence Eldridge DeWeese Edwin Dye	
V. CONCLUSION . . . . .	144
The Shift in Interdependence Issues and Comments	
.....	
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	159



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

## Figure

1. Triangle of Interdependence . . . . .	3
2. Map of Southcentral Kentucky with Locations of Three Singing School Teachers . . . . .	8
3. Continuum Showing Kinds of Songs Sung at Different Church Events . . . . .	12
4. Poster Advertising Revival, ca. 1955 . . . . .	23
5. Sample Pages from Vaughan Publications . . . . .	51
6. Promotional Poster for a 1960 Tupelo, Mississippi, Vaughan Music Normal . . . . .	55
7. Sample Pages from Stamps-Baxter Publications . . . . .	61
8. Announcement of DeWeese's Singing School . . . . .	69
9. Pine Grove United Baptist Church . . . . .	69
10. C. E. DeWeese with Pointer and Collapsible Blackboard, 1984 . . . . .	71
11. Rudiments Book and Songbook Used by DeWeese at a 1983 Singing School in Edmonson County . . . . .	72
12. Three Basic Arm Motions for Leading . . . . .	73
13. The Voice Parts as Explained in Two Different "Rudiments of Music" Publications . . . . .	94
14. C. E. DeWeese's Blackboard . . . . .	98
15. Chester Whitescarver's Chart Blackboard . . . . .	99
16. Edwin Dye's Charts . . . . .	99
17. Charts Used in Clay Neal's Singing Schools in Logan County, Kentucky, ca. 1890. . . . .	100
18. Two Ways to lead Measures with Two Beats . . . . .	103

19.	Chester Whitescarver, 1984 . . . . .	107
20.	Kentucky Harmonizers in the Early Fifties . . . . .	111
21.	C. E. DeWeese, 1984 . . . . .	116
22.	The Kentucky Vaughan Quartet in the Late Thirties . . . . .	118
23.	The Diploma and Graduation Photograph DeWeese Received Following his Attendance at the 1936 Vaughan School of Music . . . . .	120
24.	The Sacred Five in the Forties . . . . .	121
25.	Myers Evangelistic Party, 1944 . . . . .	122
26.	A Promotional Poster for a Virginia Singing School DeWeese Led in 1958 . . . . .	124
27.	A Brochure Describing a 1951 Vaughan Normal Music School in Brownsville, Kentucky . . . . .	125
28.	Two Trailers Used by the DeWeeses in the Fifties . . . . .	127
29.	The Florida Baptist Institute Choir in 1964; DeWeese Was the Choir Director . . . . .	128
30.	One of DeWeese's Compositions, "That Is Why I Love Him So" . . . . .	130
31.	Edwin Dye, 1984 . . . . .	133
32.	Four Quartets with which Dye Sang . . . . .	139
33.	Interdependence Triangle, 1835 . . . . .	145
34.	Interdependence Triangle, 1935 . . . . .	146
35.	Interdependence Triangle, 1955 . . . . .	147



## SINGING SCHOOLS IN SOUTHCENTRAL KENTUCKY

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164 Pages

Directed by: Burt Feintuch, Charles Wolfe, and Lynwood Montell

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Singing school teachers, who teach rural church congregations to sing from shape-note gospel songbooks, are still working in southcentral Kentucky, but the demand for them is smaller than it was in the first half of the twentieth century. The interdependence network in which singing school teachers, songbook publishers, and community singing events were key parts began to weaken in the 1940s as a result of the growth in popularity of professional gospel quartet concerts and gospel record albums. Many gospel music enthusiasts who once looked to songbooks as a major source for new material and for developing singing skills turned to albums and concerts in the 1940s. Singing school teachers began to be called on less frequently.

The first three chapters of this thesis contain an overview of the gospel singing events, the songbook publishers, and the singing schools. The nature of the relationship between these three gospel music institutions is established. In the fourth chapter, I profile three singing school teachers of southcentral Kentucky. In the conclusion, the development of popular religious music since the early 1800s is summarized and the importance of researching Southern white gospel music as a step toward a greater understanding of Southern music traditions as a whole is examined.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the eighteenth century, singing school teachers of various qualifications have been traveling around Kentucky trying to help rural church congregations sing better.<sup>1</sup> Efforts to teach congregations the skills of reading music began in sixteenth century England and developed into the singing school tradition active in the northern states during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,<sup>2</sup> but not until the schools spread to the South did they merge with the camp meeting movement and find an environment in which they could thrive into the twentieth century. To the present day, singing school teachers, who usually learn to teach from other singing school teachers, have carried with them an array of traditions concerning how to sing, how to lead singings, how to articulate, and how to keep a religious frame of mind while singing. The musical styles taught in these schools have influenced the musical aesthetics of rural people throughout the South, even beyond the traditions of gospel music. For example, Country and Bluegrass musicians such as the Carter Family and Bill Monroe learned harmony skills

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<sup>1</sup>John R. Graham, "Early Twentieth Century Singing Schools in Kentucky Appalachia," Journal of Research in Music Education 19 (Spring 1971):77. Graham notes a singing school that existed in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1797.

<sup>2</sup>D. W. Krummel, English Music Printing 1553-1700 (London: The Bibliography Society, 1975), p. 71. Krummel mentions the discovery of sixteenth century English solfege psalm books used to improve congregational singing.



in singing schools.<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, I will describe the singing school teachers of southcentral Kentucky, particularly as they have related to other Southern white gospel music traditions.

Most major studies of singing schools and gospel music traditions have focused on the structures and development patterns of the musical and lyric forms apparent in the songs, but this approach has clear limitations when used to formulate conclusions concerning the cultural atmosphere that supported these musical and teaching traditions. A change in the musical or lyric themes of gospel songs which a scholar might view as significant might be perceived by gospel music enthusiasts and singing school teachers as insignificant. On the other hand, seemingly small innovations such as the use of community singing conventions as arenas in which to promote gospel songbooks have had a major impact on the development of gospel music traditions, including singing schools. Like an intricate balancing act, the singing school teachers, the songbook publishers, the singing conventions, and other gospel music institutions have all been affected by the successes and failures of each other. Further, as society has changed, the equilibrium of this balance has become upset and has been regained only after major changes. In an effort to evaluate this balance, I will focus my study not on the structures and themes in gospel songs, but rather on the musical and religious institutions which have historically supported and influenced the singing school traditions.

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<sup>3</sup>Margaret Anne Bulger, "The Carter Family: Traditional Sources for Song," (Master's Thesis, Western Kentucky University, 1976), pp. 43-47; L. Mayne Smith, "An Introduction to Bluegrass," in A History and Encyclopedia of Country, Western, and Gospel Music, 2nd ed., ed. Linnell Gentry (Nashville: Clairmont Corp., 1969), p. 222.



The following diagram illustrates the triangle of interdependence that has existed between the three major kinds of gospel music institutions: those involved with instruction, such as the singing schools; those involved with supplying new songs and songbooks, such as the publishers; and those involved with the performance of gospel songs, such as the singing conventions.

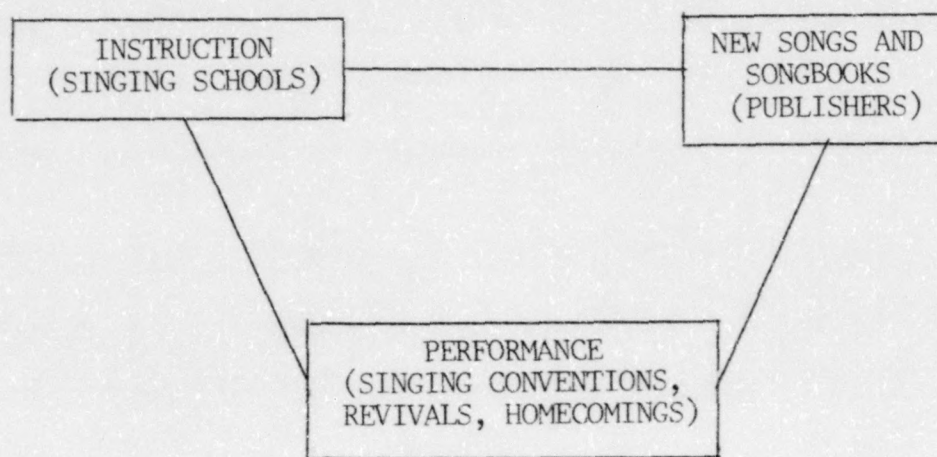


Fig. 1. Triangle of Interdependence

The singing school tradition cannot be understood apart from this basic triangle. Singing school teachers have always maintained working relationships with publishers, and they virtually always play active roles in local gospel singing events, if only as songleaders or singers. The organization of this thesis is based in large part on the conviction that all three parts of this triangle must be examined if an understanding of this teaching tradition is to be reached.

In chapter one, events in which the performance of popular religious music has occurred will be examined. Since the camp meetings of the early 1800s, the popular religious singing movement has been maintained by rural fundamentalist religious events. Interest in singing and

hearing new religious songs grew throughout the 1800s, and gatherings such as Sunday Schools, homecomings, evangelistic meetings, and singing conventions became arenas in which these songs were sung. The demand for singing school teachers generally had a strong correlation with the popularity and evolution of these events, so the teachers were usually active participants. A major point in this chapter is that while informal local singing events have strengthened the singing school tradition, professional and commercial performances by gospel singing groups have weakened this same tradition.

In chapter two, the songbook publishing companies, which before the mid-1900s had the most influence in the Southern religious singing movement, will be explored. Before the economic center of gospel music activity began to move from the publishers to the professional quartets in the late forties, the publishers and the new songs they provided were the life line of the musical tradition. Not only would a singing school teacher work closely with a songbook publisher, but, if he longed to climb the ladder of success in gospel music, he would probably hope to manage his own publishing company eventually. Teaching singing schools was perhaps merely a stepping stone. The present precarious state of the singing school tradition will be evaluated in connection with this economic shift away from the songbook publishers.

Chapter three will deal with the singing schools themselves: how they have been organized, how they have been taught, and how they have changed over the years. The information in this chapter was drawn largely from interviews conducted by the author and other fieldworkers. A recent singing school taught in Edmonson County, Kentucky, by C. E. DeWeese will be described at the beginning of the chapter and will serve



as an outline to which the descriptive material in the remainder of the chapter will be organized.

With the three kinds of gospel music institutions described, the final two chapters will present means by which these institutions may be viewed as affecting each other. The fourth chapter consists of profiles of three singing school teachers currently practicing in southcentral Kentucky: Chester Whitescarver, C. E. DeWeese, and Edwin Dye. By describing the lives of these teachers, I will be able to show more clearly how various local gospel music institutions have affected the lives of the singing school teachers. I will also compare and contrast the different methods and attitudes adopted by different teachers. For example, I will compare the full-time teacher's methods with the part-time teacher's methods and will describe the different levels at which charts have been used by different teachers. In the conclusion, I will use the triangle illustration again to summarize how the interdependence of gospel music institutions has changed during the last 150 years. Also, the importance of this study in furthering an understanding of other aspects of Southern white gospel music will be discussed.

The term "gospel music" holds different meanings depending on the group about which or to which one is speaking. Gospel music magazines and record stores use an array of terms to distinguish various kinds of gospel music such as "traditional gospel," "contemporary gospel," "black gospel," "soul music," "spirituals," "country gospel," "inspirational music," "gospel rock," and "bluegrass gospel." Although a lack of agreement in definitions of these terms exists, this disparity of terms is not necessarily undesirable because several different gospel music styles exist, each representing a different tradition. The gospel

music tradition with which I am concerned in this thesis centers on the singing at rural white church-related occasions in southcentral Kentucky, a region which, for my purposes, includes Warren County, in which Bowling Green is located, and the twelve counties within fifty miles of it.

Black gospel music has been vital in the region throughout much of the twentieth century, and contemporary Christian music is currently making inroads, but these styles are not the most pervasive ones. The region's population is over ninety percent white and the majority of the rural churches have white congregations.<sup>4</sup> Most gospel groups consist of from two to six singers, all-male or mixed, with at least a piano or guitar accompanist, and they generally sing songs learned either from shape-note songbooks published by white Southern publishers or from current gospel quartet albums. The vast majority of these groups perform more as a hobby or as a means to express an evangelical mission than as a means of gaining any substantial income.

Singing schools, in which many singers have learned the rules of reading gospel music, will be described with some detail in chapter three, but a brief description is needed now to establish the nature of the focal event in this thesis. In most cases, the leaders of a small rural Baptist or Methodist church will decide to ask a singing school teacher to lead a ten-day school at their church, paying him from their treasury. For a couple of hours every weekday evening for two weeks, the teacher will help interested members of the church's congregation, and often visitors from other congregations, to learn the skills of reading music from shape-note gospel songbooks. These students will be divided into four voice groups--

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<sup>4</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, County and City Data Book, 1983 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), pp. 214, 228.



soprano, alto, tenor, and bass--and will study scales and harmony singing with the aid of "rudiments of music" books and the teacher's blackboard. Students also learn skills in songleading, enunciating properly, and singing with proper style. The beginning and ending of each session are marked by emotional prayers, and religious themes are discussed throughout each session. On the final day of the school, a "singing" is held in which no lessons are taught and the entire community is invited to attend and listen. Occasionally, especially a few decades ago, the singing school class might arrange to perform before an audience at a local singing convention, which will be described in the next chapter.

Many diverse religious and musical traditions have influenced the development of southcentral Kentucky's singing schools. The more one digs, the more apparent the complexity of the root system becomes. But within this system, one tradition emerges as strongest, even stronger than the singing school tradition per se which probably began in Britain. I am speaking of the conversion-centered religious tradition made popular in the South by the camp meetings of the early 1800s. The words, actions, and beliefs of this largely rural religious tradition permeate most of Kentucky's gospel music activities, including singing schools. Because the strong relationship between religious traditions and gospel music traditions is a central concern in this thesis, I will begin with a chapter summarizing the variety of rural religious events that have nurtured gospel music traditions, traditions which in turn supported singing schools.





## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PERFORMANCE OF POPULAR RELIGIOUS MUSIC

During the early 1800s, southcentral Kentuckians began singing religious songs outside the churches as a result of widespread interest in camp meeting songs, and singing school teachers discovered an increasing number of people interested in learning current sacred songs. Especially after Southern tunebooks began to be easily available in the area toward the mid-1800s, many churchgoers wanted to learn to read music, and the singing school became one of the limited number of religious events generally accepted by rural congregations. The singing school tradition, first popularized in the northern states, adapted itself to the vocabulary and customs of Southern fundamentalism and became intertwined with the singing and worshiping styles of the region. In this chapter, I will describe the context in which singing schools in southcentral Kentucky have existed. I will introduce the major rural religious singing events and will show how these events connect with the lives of the singing school teachers.

For several reasons, a descriptive survey of these events is important to this thesis. First, singing school teachers teach rural church members to be better prepared to sing at religious events. The schools are not organized to help members of school bands, barbershop quartets, country music groups, or classical music groups improve their



music-reading abilities. They deal solely with gospel music. By describing the major local church events, I can better illustrate what singing school students hope to accomplish with the skills they learn.

Second, singing school teachers are usually involved at a personal level in many gospel music singing activities. These teachers are generally active as songleaders in church services and revivals. All the teachers I interviewed have been members of quartets and have been presidents of county singing conventions. Also, singing school teachers tend to have long histories of involvement with evangelical activities in general, and they are among the most knowledgeable about the broad range of fundamentalist religious traditions. To understand the life of a singing school teacher, one must have a broad understanding of the teacher's work in the church.

Third, these teachers are often connected with gospel music events at an economic level. For example, county singing conventions occasionally help sponsor singing schools. More broadly, the popular religious singing movement which grew throughout the 1800s and which ultimately resulted in the development of the singing conventions in the early 1900s generally has benefited the singing school teachers. If rural churchgoers are satisfied with simply singing the old songs they already know, little interest exists for learning to read the music. Because the gospel music events have encouraged the singing of new songs, and by extension the need to read music, singing school teachers have often been instrumental in generating interest in these religious singing events. Ironically, singing conventions triggered the decline of interest in singing schools when these conventions began to be commercialized and performance-oriented in the 1940s.

The variety, and to some extent the chronology, of popular religious singing events can be surmised by looking at the purpose statements on the title pages of religious songbooks published in the South. The first Southern-published tunebook, The Kentucky Harmony of 1816, contains a phrase that was used with slight variations by virtually all subsequent nineteenth century Southern tunebooks: "Well-adapted to Christian Churches, Singing Schools, or Private Societies."<sup>1</sup> The Ruebush-Kieffer Company, which brought Southern gospel songbook publishing to new heights in the late 1800s, added more events to their purpose statements but they often excluded singing schools from the lists as they did in their 1905 Gleanings of Praise which contains the line "for Sunday Schools, Church Services, Prayer Meetings, Revival Meetings, Young People's Societies and all kinds of Religious Work."<sup>2</sup> The company published specialized books for singing schools. Southern songbooks began to be printed in increasingly large quantities in the early 1900s, and singing schools were often mentioned in purpose statements. One of the major Southern songbook publishers, the James D. Vaughan Music Company of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, included this statement in most of its pre-World War II songbooks: "For Sunday Schools, Singing Schools, Revivals, Conventions, and general use in Christian Work and Service." More currently, the 1977 New Songs of Inspiration, Number Ten, published until recently by the Benson Company, contains the line "for home, churches, revivals,

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<sup>1</sup>Ananias Davisson, Kentucky Harmony (Harrisonburg, Va.: 1816; reprint ed., Augsburg Publishing House, 1975), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel W. Beazley et al., Gleanings of Praise (Dayton, Virginia: Ruebush-Kieffer Company, 1905), p. 1.



conventions, choirs, and crusades."<sup>3</sup> Singing schools are not mentioned but crusades join the list. Some contemporary songbook publishers, such as the Stamps-Baxter Company, still mention singing schools in the use statements in their standard songbooks. These lists of singing events suggest that publishers have targeted slightly different markets, and more generally that a diversity of religious singing events has existed. Among the most often mentioned events are revivals, singing schools, church services, and conventions.

The different events can be placed on a continuum with church services at one end and conventions at the other. In the formal church services, the older more established songs and hymns have usually been sung while at the less formal singing conventions the newer gospel songs have tended to be highlighted. Between these two extremes lie the majority of rural church singing activities.

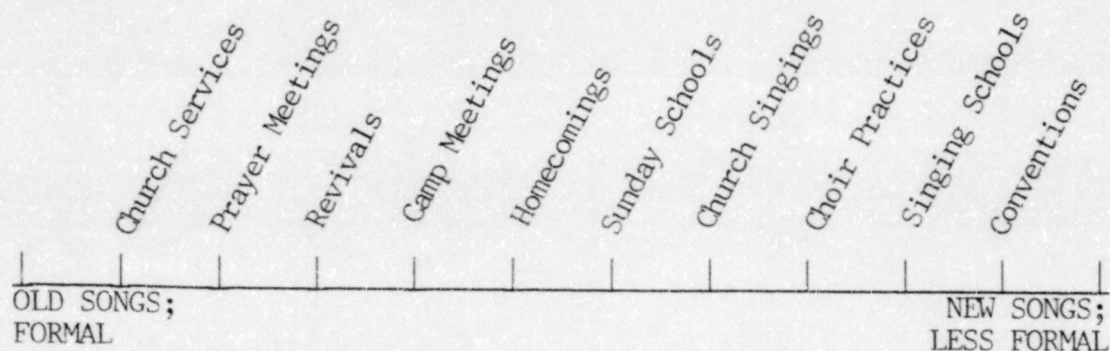


Fig. 3. Continuum showing kinds of songs sung at different church events.

The order of events in the above continuum is not engraved in stone; each church would order the events differently. Further, a standardized

<sup>3</sup>W. Elmo Mercer, comp., New Songs of Inspiration, Number Ten (Nashville: John T. Benson Publishing Company, 1977), title page.



event could be placed on the continuum differently each time it occurred. For example, one homecoming might consist of congregational singing of old songs while the next one might consist of a formal concert by local quartets. I present the continuum mainly to point out a means by which we may constructively evaluate different church events in connection with the singing that occurs at them. Also, a consciousness of this continuum will make more comprehensible "the age-old feud between ecclesiastical and popular hymnody," as E. S. Lorenz calls it, which will be described later.<sup>4</sup>

An attempt to set singing schools on the continuum presents unique problems. Although students at singing schools learn new songs, the ostensible purpose for the schools is to help teach congregations to sing better in their services. To a large degree, the singing school teachers span the continuum and are intermediaries between the different kinds of singing events. On the other hand, the singing schools themselves are formalized religious events of their own, as I will explain in chapter three, and for that reason, I place them at the "new songs" end.

In the first section of this chapter, I will focus on revivalism, the camp meeting movement, and the major rural religious events (besides singing conventions) that have attracted the attention of gospel singers through the years. In the second section, I will describe with some detail the singing conventions that began to be held in the late 1800s. These conventions became the major twentieth century gospel singing

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<sup>4</sup>E. S. Lorenz, "the Gospel Hymn," in A History and Encyclopedia of Country, Western, and Gospel Music, 2nd ed., ed. Linnell Gentry (Nashville: Clairmont Corp., 1969), p. 14.

events around which most other gospel music activities revolved. Throughout the chapter the relationship of the singing school teachers to the events will be discussed.

Revivalism, Camp Meetings,  
and Rural Church Events

The Southern singing schools have been closely connected with the popular religious singing movement which generally began in 1800 with the camp meetings. Singing schools were held in Kentucky before 1800 but not until then did they begin to find a home in Southern conversion-centered fundamentalist religion. For this reason, I want to review briefly the growth of revivalism as it relates to southcentral Kentucky and to present a descriptive inventory of religious events that sprang from this revivalism. It should be noted that in virtually all rural church events in the region, even the church business meetings, singing occurs.

The camp meetings were loosely connected with the general growth of American revivalism which began during the early 1700s in New England. Scholars have defined revivalism in many ways. William Sweet speaks of revivalism as being "in the realm of personal religion " and "the religion of the heart rather than the religion of the head."<sup>5</sup> James Downey defines a revival as "a mass assembly of people of various ages who gather to hear the forceful preaching of an evangelist who denounces them for reprehensible social practices--called 'sin' by the revivalist."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>William Warren Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York: Abington Press, 1944), pp. 140, 24.

<sup>6</sup>James C. Downey, "Revivalism, the Gospel Songs, and Social Reform," Ethnomusicology 9 (1965):115-116.



My personal conversations with gospel singers have led me to conclude that revivalism in southcentral Kentucky centers largely on the preachers' goal to create a visible emotional response from the congregation. No matter how articulate, thoughtful, forceful, or organized a revivalist preacher might be, if he does not inspire emotional excitement, he will be considered unsuccessful by himself and his listeners.

Several scholars have speculated about the reasons why revivals flourish in certain areas, and about the social, economic, and geographic conditions conducive to the existence of revivalist activities. John Boles writes that revivals usually "emerge from a period of religious entrenchment when, for a variety of reasons, religion seems declining and on the defensive."<sup>7</sup> Dickson Bruce, Jr., suggests, while writing specifically about the camp meeting revivals, that two opposing impulses in Southern settlers caused an attraction to revivalism: on one hand they longed to be self-sufficient and unrestrained while on the other hand they wanted to be responsible members of a community. This duality of purpose, plus the seemingly endless drudgery of their work, combined, according to Bruce, to cause an unstable and tense living environment. "Most of the plain folk simply accepted the situation," writes Bruce, "Many found release in drinking and violent 'sports.' But for some, a better solution was found in frontier sects."<sup>8</sup> He concludes that, in the camp meetings, settlers were able to play out this individual versus group duality and to express their hope for a better future.

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<sup>7</sup> John Boles, Religion in Antebellum Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., And They All Sang Hallelujah (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), p. 34.



Theories about the social conditions that support revivalism are difficult to nail down, however, because fundamentalist churches exist in virtually all geographic areas and economic classes, but major religious revival movements generally are born during tubulent years in which poverty, mass immigration, lawlessness, and class struggles are particularly widespread. Such was the case in southcentral Kentucky when camp meetings began to be held.

For a person traveling through the rough and rather lawless hills of southcentral Kentucky in the late 1700s, the area would have seemed an unlikely place for a major religious movement to begin. When settlers began coming in large numbers to southcentral Kentucky during the late eighteenth century, they found rolling heavily-wooded hills with a limestone soil suitable for crops and livestock, but they did not find a strong interest in organizing churches. Many settlers were longing for religious freedom, individualism, and "elbow room," and although the religious denominations destined to play the dominant role in Kentucky's religious life were established in the territory by the mid-1780s, their influence was weak.<sup>9</sup> The 1790s have come to be known as the irreligious decade, but often settlers were simply disillusioned with organized religion and wanted to make religion a more individualized experience. The camp meetings, which began in Logan County, Kentucky, answered this need for individualized religion. Nondenominational in nature, these meetings, which often lasted a week or more, attracted thousands of people and marked the beginning of the Great Revival (also called the Second Great Awakening). Church membership increased

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<sup>9</sup>Boles, Antebellum Kentucky, p. 16.

dramatically and the meetings became popular not only in the South but also in the North where revivalism had existed in a milder form since the Great Awakening of 1740.

These camp meetings, which were characterized by emotional conversion-centered preaching and singing in large open rural areas, gave religious songs the status of popular songs. Previously, with the exception of religious ballads, religious songs were generally sung only in churches and consisted of psalms and standard European hymns. In the camp meetings, Southern songleaders and preachers created their own songs by combining original or well-known verses with traditional secular melodies. Many of these spirituals, as George Pullen Jackson calls them, used melodies almost identical to those of popular ballads, love songs, and event fiddle tunes of the period.<sup>10</sup> Whether or not this combining was accomplished consciously or unconsciously, we do not know, but a new style of religious singing was born which contrasted with the slow, lined-out songs often sung in the Southern rural churches. One notable characteristic in many of the camp meeting songs was a verse-chorus pattern. The large crowds at the camp meetings could learn these songs easily and join in without difficulty.

The singing styles of the camp meeting were varied. Grover C. Loud writes of the rhythmic element of the songs and describes them as "rhythmic chants" and "singing ecstasy."<sup>11</sup> Sweet believes a rather chaotic singing style existed in which "a dozen different hymns or songs

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<sup>10</sup>George Pullen Jackson, White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1965), p. vii.

<sup>11</sup>Grover C. Loud, Evangelized America (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Library Press, 1928), p. 119.



would be sung at once."<sup>12</sup> The extensive research on camp meetings conducted by Dickson Bruce, Jr., indicates, however, that at most camp meetings different kinds of events were held. Bruce writes that although the lengthy daytime exhortations and invitations were often quite emotional and loud, events of a quieter nature such as the early morning prayer services, the midday sermons, the late-night family services in tents, and the tearful love feasts that often closed out the camp meetings were also important.<sup>13</sup> No doubt, the songs sung during these quieter events were not as lively as those sung during the exhortations. The concept of "striking fire" in the crowd and of generating a high emotional pitch was not the objective in all camp meeting events but it was important in most of them.

In the mid-1800s, the camp meetings and the hysteria that often accompanied them lost favor in much of the country as churches became more organized. In the South, the camp meetings continued in a more standardized form. The improvisational nature of the singing diminished as songbooks and tunebooks became more available, and the one-time-only camp meeting sites were slowly replaced by large shelters used for annual camp meetings. The revivalist spirit continued, however, to be strong in church services, Sunday Schools, prayer meetings, homecomings, and other church events that grew largely from the camp meeting movement.

In the 1870s, Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey ushered in an age of independent evangelical preacher-singer teams who attracted massive crowds in cities. These teams used religious songs in ways similar to

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<sup>12</sup>Sweet, Revivalism, p. 143.

<sup>13</sup>Bruce, Sang Hallelujah, pp. 80-84.

the ways they were used in camp meetings. Songs were used as means of joining people together into a frame of mind conducive to individualized conversion. Melodies and lyrics which were written almost entirely in major keys were easy to learn and laden with sentimental emotions. Moody is known to have said, "People come to hear Sankey sing and I catch them in the gospel net."<sup>14</sup> The Moody-Sankey team enjoyed enormous success throughout the United States plus Britain and other countries. The Gospel Hymns songbook series Ira Sankey edited with other composers brought the term "gospel music" into common usage and was even included in Sears and Roebucks catalogs in the late 1800s. But despite their enormous success, which has caused them and their genre of revivalism to be regarded by many scholars as representing the core of American revivalism, the Moody-Sankey team and the nationally-known evangelistic teams that followed them probably had little influence on the revivalism and religious singing in rural southcentral Kentucky. These teams did, however, mark a general change in revivalist attitudes that occurred throughout the country. Downey explains this change as follows:

The wild terror and physical activity associated with rural revivalism gave way to sentiment and compassion, weeping and touching entreaties to except the invitation of a beneficent God. . . . The "God of Wrath and Judgement" so vividly described by the early revivalists was replaced by a "God of Love and Mercy" sorrowing over the low estate of penitence.<sup>15</sup>

Musically, the minor and modal melodies associated with many early religious songs were replaced by melodies in major keys, and gospel songs have been written almost exclusively in major keys since then.

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<sup>14</sup>Downey, "Revivalism," p. 121.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 116.



The interplay of local religious events has been more central to the development of musical and religious traditions in southcentral Kentucky than has been the influence of the national evangelistic teams and crusades. In the following pages, I will describe these local church events, especially their music. The descriptions are brief and are based largely on scattered recollections by informants, but my purpose in presenting the descriptions is not to be exhaustive--space limitations forbid that. Rather, I hope to give enough information to create a sense of the musical and religious environment in which the singing schools have existed and in which gospel singers have found their audiences.

#### Revivals and Contemporary Camp Meetings

The differences between camp meetings, revivals, tent revivals, and protracted meetings are not always clearly defined but they are all relatively special church events in which fundamentalist preaching and singing traditions are presented with greater length and intensity than they are in the regular church services. Guest preachers and singers are often present at these special events.

Generally, camp meetings are large annual events that are held in a semisheltered area and are supported by many churches in a county or multicounty region. Chester Whitescarver, 71, of Russellville, Logan County, Kentucky, says he is aware of only one annual camp meeting in southcentral Kentucky, and it is held in Claymour, Kentucky. Since 1904, hundreds of people have gathered at the Claymour Camp Meetings during the last ten days in July.<sup>16</sup> A large pavilion shelters the crowds. Although he has not attended the meetings in several years, Whitescarver

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<sup>16</sup>Logan County News-Democrat, 6 August 1970.

recalls attending the events decades ago when light was provided by flaming kerosene rags stuffed into Coke bottles. He believes more singing occurred at camp meetings than at revivals:

There would be people there from all denominations in most of those camp meetings. . . . They would begin, they'd have someone that was a [song] director to begin the service with a couple of congregational songs that everybody was singing. They would have prayer then and call someone else up to sing. . . . They would have, oh, maybe six or eight songs like that, each director get up and most of the time he'd sing [lead] two songs. . . . They'd go through like that and get all the directors that they know. . . and then they would drop back and get their quartets, let their quartets get up and sing maybe four songs. They would sit down and then another group would get up and sing. Then sometimes they would have a choir from churches around that they knew, and they would call on them. . . . Then, of course, after the message they would get an alter call. If anyone wanted to come up and dedicate their lives, rededicate, or maybe a sinner would come up and give his heart to God, and I'll tell you some of them would wind up in a lot of shouting back in those days, which you don't see too much of now. . . . They would recognize all ministers that were there, they would recognize them, have them get up and tell who they were, where they were from, and to give a testimony of what the Lord was doing in their church. They really had a nice time. . . . In the revivals, they didn't have that much singing as they did in the camp meetings.<sup>17</sup>

Whitescarver recalls that a piano would generally be hauled out to the camp meeting site for musical accompaniment. Other musical instruments were occasionally played during parts of the meetings, such as the baptisings.

At the end of their revivals or the camp meetings, they would always have a baptising. . . . At that time, they didn't have their baptis-tries or tanks like some of these. In that day, they would maybe wind up their baptism on Sunday afternoon, you see, go out to the creek, the river. . . . They would take [song] books if there was very many to be baptised. If there was going to be what we call "a big baptising," they'd take books and sing, and sometimes an accor-dian. Other times, they sang without any music whatsoever.<sup>18</sup>

Although some daytime activities were held at camp meetings, the major

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<sup>17</sup>Chester Whitescarver, Russellville, Kentucky, 2-23-85, Side 1, 008.

<sup>18</sup>Whitescarver, 2-23-85, Side 1, 225.



services were held in the evening.

Revivals, or protracted meetings as they were called in the region before World War II, are similar to camp meetings but are smaller and are usually held inside a church building. Most fundamentalist churches in the region try to have at least one revival every year, and these revivals generally last a week. On rare occasions, a county-wide tent revival will be organized by several churches and will last two or three weeks, but the single church revival is clearly the norm. Usually, one preacher, often a guest, is in charge of the sermonizing, but he might have other preachers take charge on some nights. One songleader will generally lead the singing. Many churches today use guitars, banjos, electric basses, and drums in their revivals and services. During the course of the evening, a special quartet might perform a couple of songs.

C. E. DeWeese, 76, of Chalebeate Springs, Edmonson County, Kentucky, has, throughout his life, led singing at revivals and has sung with quartets that perform at revivals. He recalls that some preachers and singers dramatize their messages so as to make a greater impact on the congregation. For example, one preacher with whom he worked used techniques such as pretending to die, or placing a coffin in the sanctuary in which a mirror was placed so when the congregation walked up to view the corpse they saw themselves. DeWeese suggests these method were often effective in generating enthusiasm at revivals. He also recalls singing with quartets that dramatized some of the songs they sang. The success of a revival, according to DeWeese, was measured largely by the level at which a congregation was visibly affected by the presentations.



Fig. 4. Poster advertising revival, ca. 1955.

Both revivals and camp meetings have been major arenas for the performance of popular religious music in southcentral Kentucky. Whites-carver acknowledges that a camp meeting or revival is somewhat like a singing convention and a church service combined. They are perhaps the major church events in which the broad range of fundamentalist traditions can be expressed to its fullest.

#### Church Services, Prayer Meetings, and Sunday Schools

Psalm books, usually with no music, were brought into southcentral Kentucky in the late 1700s and early 1800s by settlers and itinerant preachers. Preachers often lined out hymns by singing each line which was repeated by the congregation. Toward the middle of the 1800s, churches were increasingly able to choose from a large variety



of songbooks and tunebooks, including ones with newer four-part hymns, anthems, and camp meeting songs. As different kinds of church events became popular, church services generally remained the events in which older, more respected songs were sung, but some churches featured new songs in their services.

Today, as then, Sunday church services occur more frequently than any of the other church events. They are usually held Sunday morning and Sunday night, but many exceptions exist. Some rural churches only meet once or twice a month. When one preacher is responsible for several churches, a special schedule needs to be arranged between the churches.

The church services begin, as do virtually all rural church events, with song and prayer. A church leader might begin a service with as many as six of seven songs but usually two or three are sung. Most churches have a piano for accompaniment, and church members occasionally bring guitars, basses, and other instruments to accompany the singing.

Most churches have choirs. Often, when a preacher instructs the choir to gather at the front to sing, he is calling for everyone in the congregation who wants to sing to gather. In some rural churches, however, especially in the more musical ones of the thirties and forties, choirs have been more organized and have even performed at singing conventions, revivals, and camp meetings. One church member will generally serve as the major songleader and choir director in each church.

Prayer meetings are usually held on Wednesday night and they generally last about an hour and a half. These meetings resemble regular church services but are less formal--often laymen are in charge--

and they involve a greater use of prayer. A few songs generally begin each meeting and a guest singing group might perform. Someone leads a short sermon or Bible study and then a prayer begins where those in attendance fall to their knees and pray aloud their individual prayers. Whitescarver believes prayer meetings were more emotional when he was young: "Old men would get to praying and, I'll tell you, they would pray for close to an hour sometimes. . . everyone get down on their knees and pray."<sup>19</sup>

Sunday Schools are held either before the Sunday church service or at about 2:00 after the noon meal. In some churches, Sunday School sessions are held every week even though church services are only held once a month. Whitescarver recalls that afternoon Sunday Schools were the norm when he was young. He explains that at the Pleasant Union General Baptist Church in Logan County the 2:00 Sunday School began with a few songs and then those in attendance split into four Bible study groups, one for each corner of the sanctuary. In a 1983 interview, the late Jeff McKinney of Lewisburg, Logan County, Kentucky, recalls that, at Wiley's Chapel, which was attended by many of the best singers in Logan County, Sunday School was often characterized by nonstop singing.<sup>20</sup> The nature of the different Sunday Schools depends on the inclination of the individual churches and Sunday School teachers.

Since the mid-1800s, Sunday Schools have been a stronghold for the popular religious singing movement throughout the country. After the Civil War, publishers began distributing songbooks geared to the Sunday

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<sup>19</sup>Whitescarver, 2-23-85, Side 2, 001.

<sup>20</sup>Jeff McKinney, Lewisburg, Kentucky, 9-20-83, Side 1, 168.



Schools, and, especially before the popularity of singing conventions, Sunday Schools were the major events in which gospel music was sung. It is likely, however, that the dichotomy between the Sunday School songs and church service songs has not been as strong in the rural South as it has been in the North and the urban South. Still, major Southern songbook publishers, such as the James D. Vaughan Music Company, have always included Sunday Schools in their lists of events in which their songs can be sung.

The church services, prayer meetings, and Sunday Schools are alike in that they occur at frequent intervals and are held in the sanctuary. Occasionally, the congregations of different churches in a community would schedule these events so no overlap would occur. For example, the Wiley's Chapel and the Pleasant Union Baptist Church, both of Deer Lick, Logan County, used to schedule their Sunday Schools and prayer meetings at different times so people in the community, especially singers, could attend the events from both churches. If these events do not have the intensity and specialness of the revivals and camp meetings, they do have the quality of being at the foundation or heart of rural church life in which musical and worship traditions are learned and maintained.

#### Homecomings and Church Singings

A number of relatively informal church events has existed in rural churches in southcentral Kentucky since the nineteenth century. These events have religious qualities about them but their major purpose is to give people a chance to socialize and to sing. Traditions associated with sermonizing and praying are not emphasized at these

events, and visitors attend them more than they do church services. Singing conventions, which I will describe later in this chapter, are among these kinds of events.

Homecomings are yearly events held at individual churches where Sunday services are followed by dinners-on-the-ground and then by singing. A couple of decades ago, the afternoon singings at homecomings were largely congregational but now guest quartets generally perform to a listening audience. Chester Whitescarver recalls that the homecomings at the Plainview Church in Logan County have produced some of the finest singing in the region:

At Plainview, the place where they have taught so many [singing] schools out there, they have that once a year. There they used to call it Old Folk's Day, and that was always first Sunday in July. . . . They still have that, and that's been going ever since I can remember. . . . Everybody is invited, everyone. . . . Their singing, it's all in the church. . . . Several different leaders, they'd call out one to lead, and say, "Following him, so-and-so get up and direct a couple of numbers." They'd do that and then they'd say, "Well, we have a quartet, a solo," or whatever. Everybody knows everybody and they want everybody to sing . . . . Most of those that come in for these homecomings, it's the families that have moved away, see, and they all come back, and they, most all of them, read music. They really have some singing. They'd just raise the roof.<sup>21</sup>

In each southcentral Kentucky county, a few churches have monthly singings. These singings are usually held on Sunday afternoons or evenings and are similar in format to the homecoming singings. A variety of gospel groups perform three or four numbers each until all groups have sung. Then each group sings again until the director of the singing decides the performances should stop. Offering plates are generally passed around near the end of the singings, and a closing prayer and congregational song often close out the events. Money from the offerings

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<sup>21</sup>Whitescarver, 11-9-83, Side 2, 009.



is generally given to the quartets, who occasionally donate the money back to the church or to another cause. The monthly singing conventions in each county are similar to the church singings except that the conventions have a countywide emphasis and are therefore more special than the church singings.

At a more commercial level, professional gospel music concerts and radio programs are widespread in southcentral Kentucky. These commercial events, along with contemporary gospel styles in general, will receive little attention in this thesis because my focus is on longstanding local events and their connection with singing schools. Professional and contemporary gospel music styles have generally hurt the singing school tradition, as we shall see later in this chapter.

An understanding of the broad range of church events is important when studying rural gospel music, and by extension the singing schools, because the gospel music traditions sprang from, and were nurtured by, rural church life in southcentral Kentucky. A musically talented person in the region, especially before the 1950s, would have been surrounded by a limited number of musical styles through which he could express his talent, and gospel music has probably been the most respected, if not the most popular, rural singing style. The singing schools have been an important part in a cycle of religious event traditions, all of which value singing. And singing school teachers are generally the church members most familiar with the broad range of singing traditions associated with rural church life. All my informants agreed that when the quality of a church's singing declines, the success of the church as a whole, particularly its attendance, also suffers. Singing school

teachers help keep the quality of singing high and therefore reinforce the strength of rural churches in general.

In the early 1900s, county singing conventions, which were often organized and led by singing school teachers, began to be organized in southcentral Kentucky and throughout much of the South. They were characterized by a combination of congregational singing and performances by local gospel groups. These singing conventions served as arenas in which the most current gospel singing styles, especially of the 1940s and 1950s, could be highlighted. The events not only mirrored the development of gospel music styles, but they were also influential in causing gospel music audiences to become more interested in simply listening rather than in singing along. These conventions influenced the singing school tradition, first in a positive way and then to its detriment. I turn my attention now to the history of these conventions.

#### Singing Conventions

It would be difficult to overestimate how central the conventions have been to virtually every aspect of gospel music, especially before the 1950s. Most singing school teachers, songbook publishers, and professional quartets, not to mention the local choirs and quartets, used the conventions as major platforms from which to promote or present their products, schools, and skills. A close examination of conventions is important in this study because popular attitudes toward singing gospel music was substantially altered due to the growth of these events. Conventions were born, in large part, from singing schools, but as the conventions became more and more performance-oriented interest in singing schools began to wane. Because of the significant influence



of the singing conventions on singing school traditions, I will describe the regional singing convention tradition in some detail. At the end of the chapter, the specific connections between the singing schools and the conventions will be evaluated.

The beginning of the singing convention tradition is unknown. In The Wings of the Dove, Lois Blackwell suggests it developed from singing schools.

The conventions saw their genesis along with the singing schools. At the conclusion of each school, the pupils would have a concert to demonstrate to relatives and neighbors their advanced musical abilities. These student singings were so much fun for performer and listener all, that each church began having singing conventions at regular periods. Soon, singers from one church were invited to sing at a neighboring congregation, and eventually the conventions were held every month or so at a designated site with the whole county in attendance.<sup>22</sup>

Oliver S. Jennings describes the origin of singing conventions in a way similar to Blackwell's description, but he adds that large annual county conventions often developed because they were held with established annual celebrations such as Decoration Day, Memorial Day, and Homecoming Day.<sup>23</sup> In effect, he suggests that at least in some counties singing conventions eventually replaced these other popular events. Also, songbook publishers were active in organizing these conventions (see chapter two).

At a more fundamental level, singing conventions have roots in informal singings which occurred in homes and churches. Jeff McKinney recalls the early 1900s when his father, a singing school teacher, would

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<sup>22</sup>Lois S. Blackwell, The Wings of the Dove (Norfolk, Va.: Donning Company, 1978), pp. 29-30.

<sup>23</sup>Jesse Burt and Duane Allen, The History of Gospel Music (Nashville: K & S Press, 1971), p. 37.

have singings at his house on Sunday night where up to forty people would gather. Also, the growing popularity during that time for singing at informal church gatherings, special song services, homecomings, and other events contributed to a greater public interest in developing regular singing conventions.

The first known singing conventions in Kentucky occurred over a hundred years ago in Benton, a small western Kentucky town, but most conventions in southcentral Kentucky were organized officially--with presidents, treasurers, and bylaws--between 1915 and 1935. By the late forties, all thirteen of the counties with which I am concerned in this thesis had regular singing conventions. The general consensus among my informants is that the largest ones in southcentral Kentucky were in Grayson, Allen, and Logan counties.

By looking at a singing convention tradition from one county, one can sense the specific cultural and social factors that influenced their growth. For that reason, I turn my attention now to the conventions of Logan County, Kentucky.

#### The Logan County Singing Convention

In 1947, during the heyday of singing conventions, a feature article appeared in the Logan County News-Democrat summarizing the Logan County Singing Convention's early history. The article states, in part:

When an event occurs with clock-like regularity throughout the span of several decades, its origin sometimes becomes a trifle hazy, and such has been the tale of the Logan County Singing Convention.

Questioned as to its conception, even its most ardent supporters know little of the first Logan County Singing Convention. However, we do have a few interesting facts, gleaned from the memories of one or two Logan Countians, who were only boys when they first attended singings.



Singings first came into prominence in Logan around 1898 and were held at the different churches, each church being host in turn. The very first meeting, as W. B. Smotherman remembers, was at Mt. Pleasant Church near Lewisburg. Another church prominent in singings was Bethel near Oak Grove. It was at this church, according to Mr. Smotherman, where the floor gave way under the weight of such a crowd, at which time the leader with great presence of mind invited the audience to finish the singing in the grove. . . .

The hymns were lined and tuning forks were used instead of musical instruments.

As the crowds attended these musical gatherings became larger, the county court issued an invitation to the groups to meet at the courthouse, about 1920 or probably a few years earlier.<sup>24</sup>

The Logan County Singing Convention, which by that time was a semiannual event held on the first Sundays in June and October, grew in popularity. A tradition began--no one know exactly when--of awarding a silver cup to the gospel choir judged to be the best at a convention. The winning church would display the cup proudly in its sanctuary until another church claimed ownership. The cup usually went either to Wiley's Chapel, where the McKinney family led the choir using Vaughan songbooks, or to Stuart's Chapel, where the Stuart family led the choir with Stamps-Baxter songbooks. Although the conventions involved congregational singing by all participants, performances by singing school classes, choirs, quartets, trios, duets, and soloists were welcomed and becoming increasingly numerous.

The older gospel music enthusiasts I interviewed spoke of these early decades with fond memories, saying that the quality of rural church singing was at its peak, and that active interest in singing schools and in singing in general was at its all-time high. Edwin Dye, 53, of Bowling Green, Warren County, Kentucky, recalls attending the Logan County Singing Convention during his childhood:

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<sup>24</sup>Logan County News Democrat, 2 October 1947.

Now back in the thirties there was very few quartets. Most all of it was class singing and congregational singing. . . . Of course, about everybody there could read music because they was having singing schools all over the country and been taught. . . . But it seems like after World War II that kindly died down and it went more for quartet singing.<sup>25</sup>

When I asked Chester Whitescarver about gospel music in his boyhood, he spoke of a time when singing schools occurred somewhere nearby every month, and of the times he walked from Lewisburg to Russellville (twelve miles) to attend the Logan County Singing Convention. Singings, whether formal or informal, were one of the major forms of entertainment and of creative expression for rural people in these early years.

In the late 1930s, changes began to occur in the Logan County Singing Convention. The size of the crowd increased dramatically. In 1939, a newspaper reporter was surprised to find that hundreds of people had filled the courtroom to capacity on Sunday morning well before the first number was sung.<sup>26</sup> Two years later, the newspaper estimated a crowd of 8000 had gathered, mostly on the courthouse lawn, to listen to the singing over the newly installed public address system.<sup>27</sup> The most influential development during this period, however, centered on the movement to highlight well-known regional quartets, such as those which had received training at the James D. Vaughan School of Music, as a means of generating greater interest among the public for the conventions.

The late forties represent the heyday of interest in the Logan County Singing Convention, but the interest was generally passive, not

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<sup>25</sup> Edwin Dye, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 12-11-84, Side 1, 241.

<sup>26</sup> Logan County News-Democrat, 5 October 1939.

<sup>27</sup> Logan County News-Democrat, 5 June 1941.



active. Although choirs continued to compete for the cup, and although congregational singing did occur, the major reason people came was to hear out-of-state big-name quartets such as the Oak Ridge Quartet with Wally Fowler, the Frank Stamps Quartet, and the John Daniels Quartet. Efforts were even initiated to make the convention a two-day affair and to have the state or tri-state singing convention meet in Russellville (neither effort succeeded). During that decade, an enthusiasm for conventions and all-night singings existed throughout the South, and many of the better gospel groups in Logan County, such as the McKinney Family and the Stuart Family, traveled regularly to singings in Nashville, Knoxville, and other cities.

Then suddenly, within a matter of a few years, interest in the Logan County Singing Convention began to decline at an alarming rate. By 1953, attendance was numbered in the hundreds, and in 1956 the newspaper carried a front page article suggesting the poorly attended event "should be kept alive as one of the pleasant happenings of yesteryear."<sup>28</sup> The semiannual convention at the courthouse was discontinued around 1957. Since the late forties, however, a monthly county singing convention had been active along with the semiannual conventions, and this monthly convention has continued to meet on the first Sunday of each month since then. The local churches host the monthly convention on a rotating basis as they did in the early 1900s. The awarding of the silver cup was discontinued after the mid-1950s, and it is currently stored at Wiley's Chapel, which last won it. Although the current conventions are to a large degree still performance-oriented, they have

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<sup>28</sup>Logan County News-Democrat, 5 October 1956.

returned in many ways to being local events as they were before World War II.

A variety of opinions exist for why the sudden decline of interest in the semiannual Logan County Singing Convention occurred. Speaking of conventions from a broad perspective, C. E. DeWeese, who believes conventions should consist mainly of congregational singing, explains:

As more quartets started singing where they could get elected as president. . . then they would invite more quartets in and they'd continue to do that until it was practically all quartet singing, very, very little congregation singing. And when they did that, in a short time the average singer that loved to sing quit going to the singing, and eventually it died.<sup>29</sup>

Edwin Dye adds that the introduction of factory work, good roads, television, and an increasing number of entertainment options was a major factor in the decline of interest in the semiannual Logan County Singing Convention. A more subtle and more specific reason for the decline is offered by Noble Stuart, who was president of the semiannual convention in 1949. He says financial considerations forced the change to a monthly format. Many people, he explains, thought of the convention as a free concert.

The thing had advanced enough so that in order to, shall we say, properly entertain the crowd, you needed to bring in guest singers as a highlight. . . . The year that I was president, this courtroom in the Logan County Courthouse at Russellville--I don't know how many people it held, pretty good size, standing room only--and naturally we took up a freewill offering to try to compensate visitors. . . and we got a collection of \$18.00. Well, I could see right then that this singing was doomed.<sup>30</sup>

He explains later that while people would gladly pay to see popular country singers, they often felt uncomfortable paying to see a gospel

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<sup>29</sup>C. E. DeWeese, Chalybeate Springs, Kentucky, 10-8-84, Side 2, 199.

<sup>30</sup>Noble Stuart, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 12-12-84, Side 1, 001.



group: "Why man, if you would have wanted to really get on the wrong side of the road back in those days: had something like that and charge admission. 'For a gospel singing?' [they would say] 'What's wrong with you? That's the Lord's work!'"<sup>31</sup> Stuart believes this attitude is unfortunate and that quality gospel singers who try to devote their lives to performing deserve support. He states without reservation that a simple lack of ability to continue attracting, or paying, top-name gospel groups was largely responsible for the decline and reorientation of the Logan County Singing Convention.

The conventions continue to occur monthly, alternating from rural church to rural church, and they show no clear sign of declining or growing. Some gospel music enthusiasts boast of never missing one. Noble Stuart, whose family has been closely involved with the convention for several decades, recalls its development since the monthly meeting format was readopted in the late forties:

We made up some bylaws for this monthly convention and we would take up a collection each first Sunday at this singing, and the guest church would get a tithe of that collection, ten percent. And those collections starting out were like twenty and thirty dollars (laughs). But no money was to be spent or was to be given to singers. Any and everybody was invited to attend the singing but there would be no money. So we put the money in the bank, on savings, and after not too long a time, believe it or not--a little over a year--the convention was able to buy a PA system, and that made for a little bit better singing. And then as the bank account grew a little bit, believe it or not--little drops of water, little grains of sand--we had another meeting and we. . . [added to] the bylaws, and the convention started sponsoring singing schools. And the church could. . . say, "We want to have a singing school," and the convention would pay half of it and the church the other half [\$150.00 total]. And it was on a first come--first serve basis with only two schools per year. . . . The singing school idea seems to have died down quite a bit. However, some church down there had one not too long ago. And also, now, the convention pays groups

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<sup>31</sup>Noble Stuart, 12-12-84, Side 1, 170.

to come, you know, not much.<sup>32</sup>

The convention usually begins about 1:30 and lasts two or three hours. Local quartets and other groups perform for periods ranging from a few minutes to over an hour. One special guest quartet from another county is generally invited, and they are always paid a small amount of money. Usually, at least once during the afternoon, all singers, young and old, experienced and inexperienced, strangers and neighbors, are invited to step up to the front of the sanctuary to form a choir, and they sing several songs from the host church's songbooks. The conventions always have a master of ceremony who, in addition to introducing the gospel groups, discusses the location of future conventions with the gathering and instructs various people to give opening and closing prayers.

In summary, the Logan County Singing Convention began around the turn of the century as a monthly singing event that was held at various rural churches in the county. Around 1920, the convention began to be held in the county courthouse as a semiannual event. Whether or not the monthly convention was discontinued at that time is not clear. By 1940, the semiannual convention had become very popular due in part to the fact that big-name gospel quartets were beginning to see the events as places to perform. After World War II, the conventions began to grow in popularity as more impressive performance lineups were organized. In the early fifties, interest in the conventions declined, due in part to the fact that professional quartets found more profitable arenas in which to perform. Monthly county singing conventions which feature local gospel groups have been held in rural churches in the county since the

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<sup>32</sup>Noble Stuart, 12-12-84, Side 1, 072.



late forties, and they continue to attract a modest following.

### The Growth of Professional Quartet Performance

The evolution of the Logan County Singing Convention is not unique. The nearby counties of Simpson, Allen, Barren, Edmonson, and Grayson all had semiannual singing conventions which were also held in county courthouses and which were attended by thousands of people. During the fifties, all these conventions went to a monthly format, and many of them have since been discontinued. Although factors such as more entertainment options, better roads, and public school music programs probably had adverse affects on the success of the singing conventions, the major issue is that the rise in gospel quartet professionalism and commercialism created a variety of ethical and economic problems which could not be successfully resolved within the singing convention context. Among the most important dynamics in this changing performance tradition is the one which has existed between professional quartets and local amateur quartets.

Most gospel groups in southcentral Kentucky have not been professional and have not wanted to be professional. Many actually insist during their performances they are singing "only for the Lord, not the money." Chester Whitescarver sang in Logan County for several years with a quartet that never asked for a flat fee. His quartet was in great demand in the county--he recalls times they sang for three funerals in one day--but they only accepted freewill offerings. Once they were approached by a promoter who wanted to manage them as a concert quartet, but they chose to keep the group as it was, a sideline, and to sing, as Whitescarver puts it, "for the blessing it brought people and the

enjoyment it brought us."<sup>33</sup> According to him, the vast majority of quartets in Logan County down through the years have held to this philosophy.

Similarly, Noble Stuart, although quite sympathetic to professional quartets, describes his personal interest in singing gospel music as a hobby, something he has always pumped money into because he loves it. He explains, "You've got to have a hobby, right? Or you need one, and I don't drink and I don't gamble. So, if I want to blow my money that way, that's fine. The whole family enjoyed it anyway."<sup>34</sup> Stuart recalls the sixties when he and his family would sing at a convention every Sunday. They had a circuit: the Logan County Singing Convention was on the first Sunday of each month; Robertson County, Tennessee, had one on the second Sunday; Todd County, Kentucky, had their convention on the third Sunday; and Warren and Muhlenberg counties had theirs on the fourth Sunday. He, like other gospel music enthusiasts, also attended monthly church singings, benefit gospel concerts, the Kentucky State Gospel Singing Convention, and other gospel music performance events in the region.

Professional quartets did, however, begin to perform in south-central Kentucky in the thirties. During that time, and up until the late forties, traveling quartets were generally associated with major gospel music publishing companies whereby these quartets would earn money through commissions from booksales and from donations. (A small percentage of exceptional quartets were paid by publishers or were able

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<sup>33</sup>Whitescarver, 2-23-85, unrecorded conversation.

<sup>34</sup>Noble Stuart, 12-12-84, Side 1, 218.



to make a living from concerts.) The meager and tenuous living made through commissions was satisfactory to traveling gospel groups during the Depression, but in the forties, as the promotional potential of radio stations and phonograph albums became apparent, many of them struck out on their own. They tried to earn the trust and admiration of a paying public, and many of them succeeded. By the mid-fifties, most professional quartets had lost interest in singing conventions.

The disassociation of the professional quartets from the conventions was probably not the sole result of the quartets' decisions to better their standard of living; many spectators were unhappy with the quartets. A large amount of verbal lore exists concerning the outlandish activities of wayward professional quartets. For example, stories are told of quartet members who testify and act "goody-goody" on stage but are thrown in jail for drunken behavior late at night, and of convention quartets that lack the courtesy to listen to other singers. It is reasonable to assume that, in the forties and fifties, gospel music enthusiasts, although ecstatic about hearing top-name quartets live, would often fall back on a fundamental scepticism of these groups when the donation plates were being passed.

The professional quartets were clearly unhappy, however, with several aspects of the performance environment at the singing conventions. In "Gospel Goes Uptown: White Gospel Music 1945-1955," Charles Wolfe explains why these quartets grew to dislike the conventions:

The singers at a singing convention were trained musicians, able to sightread shape notes with ease; many of the new professionals sang by ear, and had difficulty reading from the songbooks. Connor Hall recalls that many of the new slick quartets got to hate being invited to the singing conventions because, although they would be the center of attention when they performed in concert on

Saturday night, they would often have to suffer the embarrassment of sitting with their mouths closed on Sunday as the convention went about its sight-reading singing. For years the singing conventions invited quartets to provide special music and attract crowds; now the newer quartets were more and more anxious to break off from this association.<sup>35</sup>

Later in the article, Wolfe writes, "The quartets. . . saw the singing convention publishers and their supporters as standing in the way of their artistic and commercial development."<sup>36</sup> The professional quartets clearly contributed to the decline of interest in conventions, gospel songbooks, and singing schools.

A turning point in the performance of gospel music occurred in the forties when congregational singing was largely replaced in many singing events by quartet singing. This transition was smooth, but after the professional quartets abandoned the conventions in the fifties, a transition back to congregational singing did not occur. Today, even single church singing events, with the exception of church services, include very little congregational singing. Music-reading skills were perhaps lost, and then never regained, after the congregational singing aspect of the conventions were de-emphasized.

The shift away from congregational singing hurt the singing school tradition because singing schools have always had their strongest connection with congregations rather than with quartets. C. E. DeWeese explains, "Only a small percentage, I think, are interested in joining a quartet. . . . I think they're just going to school to educate

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<sup>35</sup>Charles K. Wolfe, "Gospel Goes Uptown: White Gospel Music, 1945-1955," in *Folk Music and Modern Sound*, Eds. William R. Ferris and Mary L. Hart (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), p. 96.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 97.



themselves enough to where they can enjoy the singing more. . . pick up a new song and sing it."<sup>37</sup> But because most gospel music singers today prefer to learn new songs from friends or from other singing groups rather than in classes, congregations, or conventions, attending singing schools no longer represents, for many singers, a vital step toward a greater appreciation and successfulness in gospel singing. For these people, the radio and the phonograph have replaced the singing school teacher.

The singing of new songs by large groups or congregations in southcentral Kentucky seldom occurs today, and the reason for this decline is likely connected to an array of factors ranging from gospel quartet politics to increased entertainment options. It is clear, however, that, although some rural churches occasionally call on singing school teachers to help them improve the quality of singing in their choirs and congregations, the demand for these teachers will not be strong as long as singing and learning new songs from the printed page is not perceived as being important by rural church members, as it once was.

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<sup>37</sup> DeWeese, 10-15-84, Side 1, 115.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SONGBOOK PUBLISHERS:

#### A TRADITION OF NEWNESS

Like partners, the singing school teachers and the songbook publishers worked closely with each other throughout the South. Especially between the turn of the century and World War II, a strong mutual dependence existed: the teachers needed the songbooks and commissions from the publishers, and the publishers needed the promotional efforts of the singing school teachers. Major publishers even sponsored normal music schools to train prospective teachers and songleaders who would in turn encourage their home churches and communities to purchase new songbooks. At a more fundamental level, the teachers and publishers worked together to promote an attitude that new songs were to be preferred over old songs, an attitude crucial to the continued success of both institutions. In this chapter, I will examine the growth and influence of religious songbook publishers as they have related to singing school teachers in southcentral Kentucky. An emphasis will be placed on the two most influential songbook publishers to the region: the James D. Vaughan Music Publisher of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee; and the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company based in Dallas, Texas.

Although none of my informants could even speculate about songbooks used before 1900, it is clear the availability of Southern-published



religious songbooks began almost a century earlier. Few records have been kept concerning the religious songbooks used in early nineteenth century Kentucky, but we know from the extensive research of scholars such as George Pullen Jackson, Harry Eskew, and Irving Lowens that many existed.<sup>1</sup> By the mid-1800s, singing school teachers in Kentucky would have been able to choose from a couple of dozen Southern-published oblong-shaped "tunebooks," as they were then called. For the small percentage of teachers in Kentucky who preferred Northern tunebooks, hundreds of them were available even in the early 1800s. The first Southern tunebook was Ananias Davisson's Kentucky Harmony, published in 1816.<sup>2</sup> Davisson compiled not only psalms, hymns, and anthems, but also songs from the camp meeting and revival movements. The format of the songbook, with its use of the four-shape notation system developed in 1798 and with a "rudiments of music" section at the beginning for singing school teachers, became the standard for antebellum tunebooks in the South. Another tunebook which is known to have found its way into western and southcentral Kentucky in the mid-1800s is the Southern Harmony by William Walker, first published in 1835.<sup>3</sup>

A relatively self-centered self-perpetuating Southern music

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<sup>1</sup>George Pullen Jackson, White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1965); Harry Eskew, "Shape-Note Hymnody in the Shenandoah Valley, 1816-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1966); Irving Lowens, Music and Musicians in Early America (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>Ananias Davisson, Kentucky Harmony (Harrisonburg, Va.; reprint ed., Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1976).

<sup>3</sup>William Walker, The Southern Harmony (Spartanburg, S.C.: 1854; reprint ed., Los Angeles: Pro Musicamericana, 1966).

tradition, from which gospel music evolved, began its development in the early 1800s. The Southern tunebooks were usually, if not always, compiled by Southern singing school teachers. These teachers in turn trained the next generation of teachers and publishers, and this cycle continued, largely by-passing the classical European music tradition so popular in the Northern states and public schools.

After the Civil War, the religious songbook publishing business, fueled by a continuing growth in rural church membership and Sunday School attendance, expanded and changed. The size of the songbooks decreased but efforts to publish new songbooks more frequently and at regular intervals began. As increasing number of composers throughout the country were trying their hands at writing popular religious songs. As mentioned earlier, the evangelical team movement, as characterized by Moody and Sankey, added another element to the growth in songbook sales. In the post-Civil War South, a seven-shape notation system began to replace the four-shape system used since the early 1800s (see chapter three). Also, the Ruebush-Kieffer Company of Dayton, Virginia, the first large Southern songbook publishing company, began making an impact throughout the South.

The Ruebush-Kieffer Company is notable not only for its long-term success (from 1859 to 1915) as a songbook publisher, but also for its innovative ideas in marketing and distributing which greatly influenced the Southern songbook publishers that followed. In 1859, the company began publishing the first journal devoted to Southern shape-note singing, The Southern Musical Advocate and Singer's Friend. The publication was suspended during the Civil War but began to circulate again in 1870 under the name The Musical Million, which was published



until 1915. Through reading these journals, people throughout the South became acquainted with the company. But the key to the company's commercial success is suggested by the ads that appeared in many of its late nineteenth century songbooks which states, "Do you want a Normal Singing School or a Convention? Write us."<sup>4</sup> The first normal music school in the South was organized by the company in 1874, and these normal schools attracted singers, who became buyers, from many Southern states. At the normals, extensive singing schools were team-taught by several teachers. Organizing conventions was also a profitable undertaking for the publisher. The extent to which Kentucky's singing conventions were organized by publishers such as Ruebush-Kieffer is not known; but it is clear that by organizing a singing convention in a county, a publisher could open up a huge consumer market. Lifetime loyalties to publishers and even to particular songbooks often began as a result of these normals and conventions.

The companies such as Ruebush-Kieffer and Showalter that implemented these promotional ideas enjoyed enormous success compared with the publishers that did not. For example, although the Methodist Publishing House of Nashville, Tennessee (sixty miles south of Bowling Green), published many gospel songbooks from the mid-1800s on, none of these songbooks made a significant impact in rural southcentral Kentucky because the company apparently did not implement promotional campaigns at a local level to the extent many nondenominational songbook publishers did. Generally, denominational publishers disliked using the kinds of promotional campaigns used by the nondenominational publishers.

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<sup>4</sup>For example, see J. H. Ruebush et al., Crowning Day Nos. 3 and 4 Combined (Dayton, Va.: Ruebush-Kieffer Company, 1898), back cover.

The use of particular promotional and marketing techniques was not the only activity around which controversy between church authorities and gospel songbook publishers revolved. The use of shape-note notation has never been supported by classically-trained church musicians. But most gospel music enthusiasts have taken in stride, if not thrived on, the criticisms levied against their music. Noble Stuart, like all my informants, believes the shape-note songbook publishers have helped the rural people learn music when no other musical organization made the effort. He believes, "Had it not been for shape notes, there's hundreds and hundreds of people that would never have been able to sing a song."<sup>5</sup>

A more general criticism by classically-trained church musicians against gospel songs is that they are inferior lyrically and musically. In a 1927 article, E. S. Lorenz defends the gospel hymns against a number of criticisms:

The age-old feud between ecclesiastical and popular hymnology has broken out afresh. There is an organized propaganda against the gospel hymn which has captured the reorganized Sunday-school work. Appeal is being made to literary and musical pride, to the more or less laudable ambition to be strictly up to date, to the desire to conform to ostensibly high authority and to loyalty to the attitude of the general organization. In much of this propaganda there is a partisanship, even a fanaticism, that is not conducive to clear thinking. There is a failure to appreciate that while the standard hymns are the winnowed product of two centuries, the gospel hymn as we know it is still in the process of making after only about sixty years of development, the winnowing having been barely begun. . . .

Another phrase of this zeal without knowledge is an apparent blindness to the varied song needs of an active congregation. The only need recognized is that of the regular Sunday morning service, in which dignity and reverence are generally accepted as essential characteristics. The needs of the popular evening service intended to attract the general public, of the Sunday school, of the prayer

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<sup>5</sup>Noble Stuart, 12-12-84, Side 1, 408.



meeting, of the young people's meeting, of evangelistic services and campaigns, are all overlooked or misunderstood. For these the sedate hymns, and frequently dull and uninspired tunes, are not at all fitted. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Later in the article, Lorenz develops a theory that different religious traditions define "best hymns" differently. The nature of Lorenz's defense in general suggests he found the criticisms that gospel hymns were too lively and inferior in quality to be most widespread. Although some rural church leaders in southcentral Kentucky have frowned on gospel singings as conflicting with church services and being too secular, rural churches and songbook publishers have, by and large, maintained a strong relationship which has helped gospel music enthusiasts withstand criticisms. In fact, most rural churches in southcentral Kentucky today use shape-note church songbooks published by gospel songbook publishers.

The newness aspect of the gospel music tradition also distinguishes it from the large-church tradition of singing standard hymns. The phrase "a tradition of newness," contradictory as it might sound, can be appropriately applied to a major aspect of the popular religious singing movement. Even early tunebooks contain in their title pages statements emphasizing that new songs by eminent authors are included. By the early 1900s, most gospel songbooks contained mainly new songs. Just as many contemporary music enthusiasts await the arrival of their favorite musical group's new album, so did gospel music enthusiasts in the early and mid-1900s await the arrival of their favorite publisher's new songbook. The excitement a new songbook brought to some singers

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<sup>6</sup>E. S. Lorenz, "The Gospel Hymn," in A History and Encyclopedia of Country, Western, and Gospel Music, 2d ed., ed. Linnell Gentry (Nashville: Clairmont Corp., 1969), pp. 14-15.

can be sensed in Gwen McKinney's narrative about her husband, Jeff, and Jim, her brother-in-law:

You know what I've seen them do? Jeff would be out in the tobacco patch working; Jim gets new books in the mail and he'd come over to the tobacco patch, and they'd set down and go to singing out there in the tobacco patch. I thought it was crazy. They'd sing 'til they got tired and then get up and go to work.<sup>7</sup>

The interest in new songs was not rooted solely in aesthetic judgement but also in a religious belief that new songs were better. A person arguing for a greater use of new gospel songs might defend his position by quoting Biblical passages such as Isaiah 40:10, Psalms 33:3, and Psalms 40:3 that call for the singing of new songs. For example, the late Jeff McKinney was devoted to the idea that new songs were better than old songs. Although he could tolerate older songs during church services at the small Methodist church he attended, he argued that one of the major problems with contemporary conventions and other singings was that new songs were rarely sung, as they once were. As for poorly-written songs, McKinney suggested they seldom made it into reputable songbooks.

The gospel songbook publishing business was booming in the early 1900s, and dozens of these publishers were springing up in the South. In southcentral Kentucky, a widespread enthusiasm for gospel music did not exist until the early decades of the twentieth century because the major songbook publishers of Ruebush-Kieffer and Showalter apparently preferred to promote their books through conventions and schools in the deep South, choosing perhaps to avoid the rugged terrain of Kentucky and

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<sup>7</sup> Gwen McKinney, 9-20-83, Side 1, 620.



Tennessee.<sup>8</sup> When the gospel singing movement did spread with more strength into southcentral Kentucky, the rural people embraced it; and by the 1910s, conventions and singing schools were becoming increasingly numerous. Southcentral Kentucky has never been home to a large successful songbook publishing company; but in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, around the turn of the century, James D. Vaughan organized a company that was to have a profound influence, along with the Stamps-Baxter Company, in the growth of gospel music in the region.

James D. Vaughan Music Publisher

As far as the singing school teachers of southcentral Kentucky are concerned, James D. Vaughan and his company in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, started the whole gospel singing movement. Even during the first decades of the twentieth century, his songbooks were widely used in the region, and his normal music schools trained many of Kentucky's singing school teachers and singers. Not only was Vaughan successful as a publisher, teacher, and businessman, but he also commanded a great deal of respect and admiration from rural gospel music enthusiasts throughout the South.

James D. Vaughan was born in Giles County, Tennessee, in 1864. Educated in a private school, he became a public school teacher but enjoyed teaching singing schools as a sideline, even at the age of eighteen. He, with his brothers, organized a quartet that sang at his

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur L. Stevenson lists the twenty-four singing schools advertised in a 1908 issue of The Musical Million, and found that Mississippi, South Carolina, and North Carolina were the states where most of them were held. Neither Kentucky nor Tennessee were mentioned. See Arthur L. Stevenson, The Story of Southern Hymnology (Salem, Va.: Arthur L. Stevenson; printed in Roanoke, Va.: Stone Printing and Manufacturing Company, 1931).

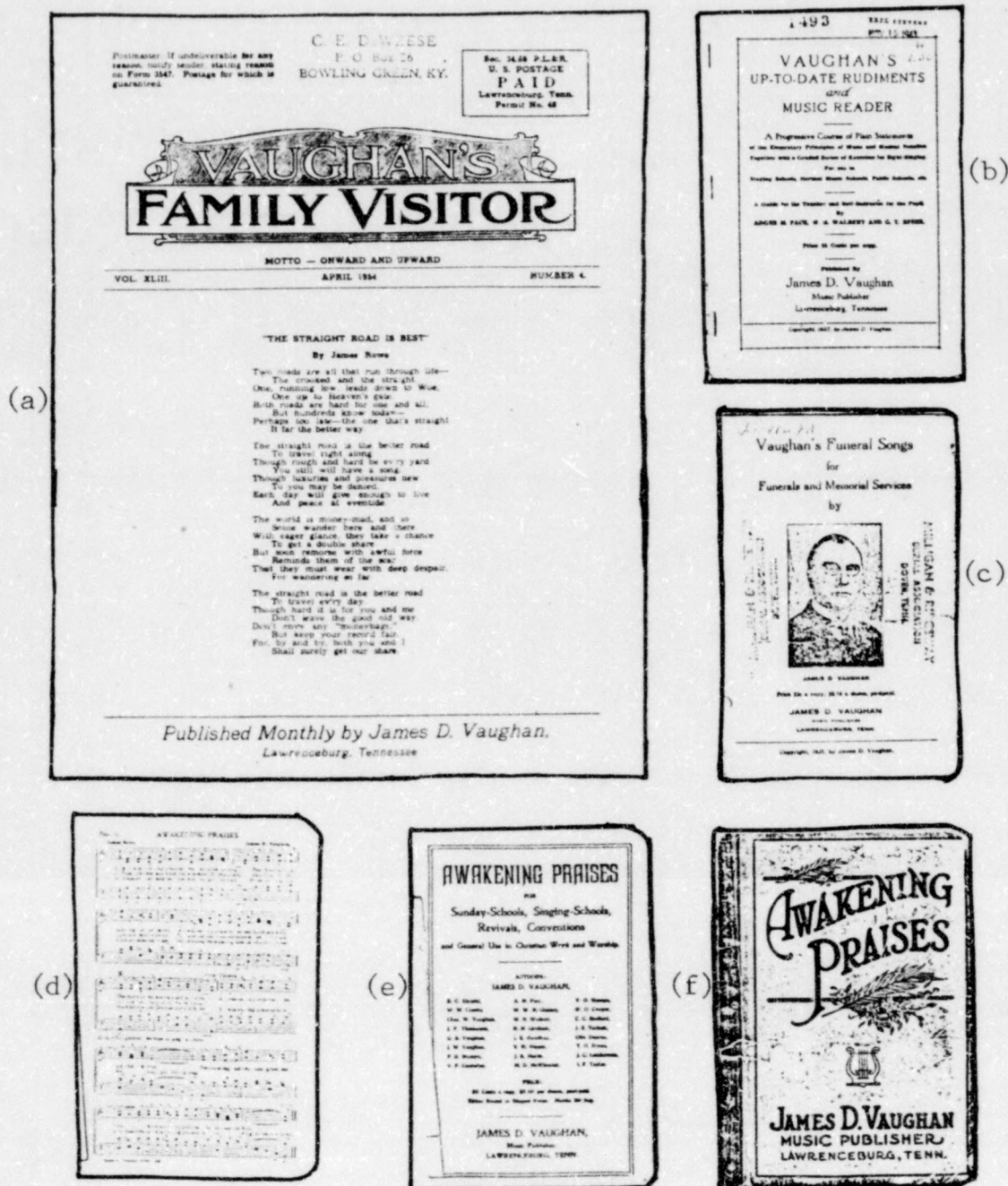


Fig. 5, (a) through (f). A sample of Vaughan publications (size greatly reduced). (a) Vaughan's Family Visitor, cover, April 1954. (b) Vaughan's Up-To-Date Rudiments and Music Reader, title page, 1937. (c) Vaughan's Funeral Songs, a special edition songbook, title page, 1937. (d) through (f), Awakening Praises, convention book; song, title page, and cover, 1923.



singing schools as a special feature. While in his twenties, he and his brother, Charles Wesley, studied at normal schools taught by Benjamin C. Unseld of the Ruebush-Kieffer Company, and by E. T. Hildebrand of the Hildebrand-Burnett Company, also of Virginia. When he settled down in Lawrenceburg in 1902, he had already published two songbooks, but not until that year did he establish the James D. Vaughan Music Publishing Company.

The company was successful, and beginning in 1910 it published at least one songbook every year. Most of the publications were convention songbooks, but the company also released church songbooks, instruction books, school songbooks, and special collection songbooks for radio and concert quartets. Between 1910 and 1912, Vaughan began sponsoring three concerns in addition to his songbook publishing work: a monthly journal, normal music schools, and professional quartet concerts. All three of these business ventures proved to be not only successful, but quite influential in the development of conventions and singing schools in the South as well.

The Musical Visitor, which later became Vaughan's Family Visitor, began as a monthly journal in 1912. The journal, which included one or two dozen pages of short articles, songs, photographs, ads on gospel music supplies, and letters from singing school teachers and other readers, remained essentially the same until the mid-sixties. It continues to be published today in a modified, shortened form. Of particular interest to this thesis are the letters submitted by southcentral Kentucky teachers and singers concerning the activities of their home singing schools and conventions. The following sample of letters from southcentral Kentucky, chosen somewhat randomly from

issues published in 1915, is representative of the letters sent to the journal, even in the 1950s:

Dear Visitor and Readers: I enjoy reading the Visitor. I am a great lover of music, but think vocal music is the greatest of all. Good singing certainly has an inspiring tendency. I must tell you about our great singing school we had at Liberty Church in January taught by Prof. Weams. It was a grand success. Enrolled a hundred students in spite of bad weather. . . . We are making him another school for January 1916. . . . We have a singing convention here in Allen County. It meets at Walker's Chapel 5th Sunday in May. Wishing the Visitor and readers success, I am your friend. "From Old Ky"  
Vernon Conner.<sup>9</sup>

Dear Editor and readers of the Visitor: I will give a report of my work since my last writing. I have been busy teaching and singing. I taught a class at Siloam church [sic] near Glasgow, Ky., beginning Jan. 4th and continuing 10 nights; enrolled 58. At the close of school the good people employed me to conduct the song service in the revival meeting. I went from Siloam to Bethel church and taught a 12 nights' school; enrolled 85. I went from Bethel Church [sic] to Lick Branch church and taught a 12 nights' school, enrolled 60. I am now teaching the second school at Bethel. Will go back to Siloam church and teach another there. . . . I have a number of calls to teach at other places. I close wishing all much success. Yours in the work, L. E. Butrum.<sup>10</sup>

Dear Visitor: I have taught one school since I came back from the normal and I have begun another at Woodson Chapel Baptist church, and I feel that my pupils approve of my work. I attended our singing convention of Muhlenberg county, held at Brier Creek church second Sunday in May and it was fine. It was called to order at ten a.m. by president O. W. Plain and we had six choirs enrolled. Our next convention will meet at Central City, Ky., the fourth Sunday in June. I invite all you normal people to meet with us on that date and help us to get the pupils interested in music in the county. . . . Speak a kind word for me all the time and we will sing all the while.  
S. C. Clardy.<sup>11</sup>

Through having their letters appear in the journal, singing school teachers could gain more singing school jobs, advertise their local conventions, and maintain a relationship with the Vaughan staff which could

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<sup>9</sup>The Musical Visitor, March 1915.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., June 1915.



lead to invitations to teach at Vaughan's normal schools.

Vaughan's normal music schools were preceded by others, but none which enjoyed the same level of success. Normal music schools began to be held in the North before the Civil War, and their purpose was to produce music teachers. Ruebush-Kieffer organized the first Southern normal schools in the 1870s, which were followed by those organized by Showalter and Vaughan. The close connection between the normals of these three publishers is demonstrated by the fact that Benjamin Unseld was hired to lead all of them. The Southern normals differed from the Northern ones in several ways. The Northern ones emphasized European classical traditions and were specifically for teachers. The Southern ones generally emphasized the singing of shape-note gospel music, and, although many singing school teachers received training in them, the majority of the students simply wanted to improve their singing abilities.

The Vaughan normals, which originally were held in Lawrenceburg for six weeks in January, were eventually shortened to three weeks and began to be organized not only in Lawrenceburg but in towns and cities throughout the South. The Vaughan Company made arrangements to use a school building or other large building in a city, and then hired teachers to join forces for a few weeks to teach various music subjects. A teacher would generally feel honored to be asked to help with a Vaughan normal. C. E. DeWeese was a southcentral Kentuckian very much involved in teaching at Vaughan normals, as I will explain in chapter four.

James D. Vaughan, who died in 1941, left behind him a great many people who admired his work and his religious sincerity. Jeff McKinney, who proclaimed earnestly, "There's a heap more gospel, used to be, goes out in a song than in a preacher," attended Vaughan

# The Vaughan Music Normal

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Fig. 6. Promotional poster for a 1960 Tupelo, Mississippi, Vaughan Music Normal.



normals in Lawrenceburg in 1927 and 1928 with his brothers who eventually formed the McKinney Quartet.<sup>12</sup> His loyalty to Vaughan and his company was always strong, and he praised the Vaughan books as having better songs and clearer print than any other publisher. Similarly, C. E. DeWeese, who says he grew to know Vaughan very well while attending Vaughan normals in Lawrenceburg in the late thirties, speaks fondly of the publisher as he knew him during his final years when he taught Bible classes instead of music:

Mr. Vaughan was a real good man, real good man. All he taught was Bible. He knew his Bible, too. He didn't teach denomination. He just taught Bible. But he had other teachers that taught the music, and he taught Bible when I was down there. He was a real good Christian man. He passed away in '41. I had just left down there, just a short time. He was sick then. But the undertaker said that he was the only person that he ever took care of that had callouses on his knees, praying. He was a good honest, good devoted man. . . . Mr. Vaughan was very generous. I never saw him turn anybody down that he thought needed help. I've seen him send people to the restaurant; he had an understanding with the restaurant to feed anybody that he sent there. He'd pay the bill. I've seen them come in there, hungry, and there's been a many a boy and girl that's come to the school when they didn't have money to even pay the board, and he'd pay their board, room and board, and tuition; let them attend the school. If they could pay him back, alright. If they couldn't, why that was still alright. I know personally different ones. He was really too good for his own financial good. But Mr. Vaughan was a real good man. After Mr. Vaughan passed away, . . . Kieffer [James' son] took over as long as he was able. Mr. Vaughan has one daughter still living. She's in her nineties. I visited with her just about a week ago.<sup>13</sup>

The one-big-happy-family attitude of people who had come in contact with the Vaughan Company was typical of many songbook publishers in the South and helps explain why singing school teachers have often maintained lifelong loyalties to one publisher.

Vaughan did not live to see the major problems that were to plague

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<sup>12</sup> Jeff McKinney, 9-20-83, Side 1, 233.

<sup>13</sup> C. E. DeWeese, 10-8-84, Side 1, 409.

the songbook publishing business in the late forties and fifties. Ironically, he was one of the first to promote his songbooks by using quartets, records, and radio stations, all of which eventually contributed to the decline of interest in songbooks. The Vaughan Quartet was originally one special group that traveled to conventions and revivals throughout the South, but by the late 1920s, at least sixteen different Vaughan quartets were active. From southcentral Kentucky, the Vaughan Sacred Four and the Kentucky Vaughan Quartet were among the Vaughan quartets that were touring during the late thirties. These quartets generally earned their income through songbook sales and donations, but they would use the Vaughan name to evoke respect and to advertise their successful completion of one of Vaughan's normals. As the quartets began to be more visible through radio, records, and television, gospel music enthusiasts began to focus on the particular quartets rather than on song collections. Thus, publishers suffered a decline in sales.

The Vaughan Company stayed in the family until 1964, when Kieffer Vaughan no longer felt able to manage the business. Jo Lee Fleming describes the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the selling of the company:

Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that two of the largest firms, the James D. Vaughan Music Publisher of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, and the Stamps Quartet Music Company of Fort Worth, Texas, were sold in 1964 to the Skyliters Recording Company of Memphis, a firm formed by the Blackwoods and the Statesmen Quartets. They promptly quit the publication of convention books. . . . Mr. Roan quoted one of the new "publishers" as saying, "We're going to do away with the conventions and the convention books if we can. If the people want to hear gospel music, they're going to have to come to our concerts to hear it."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Jo Lee Fleming, "James D. Vaughan, Music Publisher, Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, 1912-1964" (S.M.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1972), p. 156.



Within a couple years, the Skyliters Company decided to sell the Vaughan Company to three Church of God preachers. These preachers contracted with the Tennessee Music Company in Cleveland, Tennessee, to print the books. Eventually they went so far in dept that the Tennessee Music Company took over the rights to Vaughan's publishing empire and is still publishing Vaughan songbooks yearly. Interest in the songbooks has declined substantially, however, since the Vaughan family sold the company.

Today, the Vaughan songbooks have little influence in south-central Kentucky. The major regional market for shape-note books lies with the church song and hymn books. New songbooks are rarely passed out at conventions, and they are no longer disseminated into communities through singing schools. The Vaughan Company once published a widely used church songbook called Great Gospel Songs and Hymns,<sup>15</sup> but the Tennessee Music Company discontinued it because it would have competed with their Church Hymnal.<sup>16</sup>

A few churches, such as Wiley's Chapel in Logan County, still maintain loyalties with the Vaughan Company; and two of the three singing school teachers I interviewed prefer the Vaughan instruction books over any others. But the influence of the company in southcentral Kentucky is, on the whole, subtle--as is the respect one has for a once powerful and benevolent organization. The Vaughan books are certainly not absent from the region--no doubt a number of rural people still subscribe to the songbooks--but it seems unlikely a growth of interest

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<sup>15</sup>Great Gospel Songs and Hymns (Lawrenceburg, Tennessee: James D. Vaughan Music Publisher, 1942).

<sup>16</sup>Church Hymnal (Cleveland, Tennessee: Tennessee Music and Printing Company, 1951).

in Vaughan songbooks will occur, especially in light of the long-standing continuing popularity of Stamps-Baxter songbooks.

Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company

Although the James D. Vaughan Music Publisher has probably been the most influential Southern songbook publisher in the twentieth century, the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company has enjoyed a greater commercial success. To a large extent, the Stamps-Baxter Company used the ideas implemented by Vaughan, then developed them to a larger and more profitable level. From their home office in Dallas, Texas, and from their branch offices throughout the South, they organized quartets, radio stations, conventions, normal schools, and all-night sings to promote their books. In southcentral Kentucky, Stamps-Baxter books are widely used by churches and singing school teachers. For decades, Vaughan and Stamps-Baxter songbooks were equally popular in the region, but during the Vaughan Company's transitional years in the sixties, Stamps-Baxter clearly gained a larger patronage.

In 1924, V. O. Stamps, who was Vaughan's Texas representative, decided to organize his own songbook publishing company. Within a couple years, J. R. Baxter, Jr., formerly with the Showalter Company, joined him to form the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company, which they stationed in Dallas. Texas was receptive to the new company, and sales began to boom. Baxter lived in Chattanooga, Tennessee, managing a branch office until V. O. Stamps died in 1940, at which time Baxter moved back to Dallas as sole owner of the company. V. O. Stamps' son, Frank, who wanted the Stamps family to remain a strong force in the



gospel music industry, split from the Stamps-Baxter Company to form the Stamps Quartet Company which was a major songbook publishing company until it folded in the mid-sixties. The Stamps-Baxter Company was always more successful, however, and the Baxter family maintained control over it until the mid-seventies when they sold it to the Zondervan Corporation which still manages the publishing of Stamps-Baxter books.

The tremendous success of the Stamps-Baxter Company during its early years is demonstrated by the number of people touched by the company's work. In the late twenties, the Stamps' All-Star Quartet cut a single that purportedly sold over 500,000 copies, breaking all previous sales records. The company's Dallas normal school of 1939 had an enrollment of about six hundred and concluded with an all-night singing at the Cotton Bowl (Vaughan's enrollment was usually about one hundred). Between 1938 and 1955, not only did they publish two convention songbooks per year, like Vaughan, but they also published, with few exceptions, two special songbooks every year which contained songs for special occasions or particular groups. Most of the six hundred or so songs published every year were composed by company editors but thousands of songs were submitted by outside writers. Like Vaughan, Stamps-Baxter had over a dozen quartets traveling throughout the South singing for concerts and radio programs, but the Stamps-Baxter Company and the Stamps Quartet Company were much more instrumental than was the Vaughan Company in the development of professional quartets such as the Blackwoods, Statesmen, and Cathedral Quartets. Perhaps the business sense and vast influence of the company were major reasons why they were able to better withstand the changes in the gospel music





industry during the fifties.<sup>17</sup>

Most gospel music enthusiasts in southcentral Kentucky were familiar with the Stamps-Baxter Company only through their songbooks and perhaps their monthly journal, Gospel Music News,<sup>18</sup> but some singers did have the opportunity to attend their normals in Dallas. For example, two brothers of the Campbell family in Logan County not only attended a Stamps-Baxter normal but they ended up staying as staff members. In the recollections of my informants, the Stamps-Baxter Company never conducted normals in southcentral Kentucky as Vaughan did, but they did promote their books at conventions and singing schools.

In her dissertation on the Stamps-Baxter Company, Shirley L. Beary concludes that the strength of the company was in church books, and her conclusion is certainly true for southcentral Kentucky today.<sup>19</sup> Although a conclusive survey of church songbooks in the region has not been conducted, several of my informants mentioned that the Stamps-Baxter's 1956 Heavenly Highway Hymns was used in many rural churches.<sup>20</sup> Because of this familiarity with the company's church books, when church members in southcentral Kentucky decide to order convention books for a singing school or choir, they will likely choose to buy from Stamps-Baxter.

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<sup>17</sup> Shirley L. Beary, "The Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company: A Continuing American Tradition 1926-1976" (D.M.A. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), pp. 115, 146, 104, and 191.

<sup>18</sup> Gospel Music News was started in 1935.

<sup>19</sup> Beary, "Stamps-Baxter," p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Luther G. Presley, comp., Heavenly Highway Hymns (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Co., 1956).

When I asked why they preferred Stamps-Baxter songbooks over others, informants often explained that the relatives and teachers from whom they learned had introduced them to the publisher and that they never felt like changing. Other more specific reasons for a preference did surface, however. For example, Edwin Dye explains his decision to use Stamps-Baxter books in the following passage:

There's a little bit of difference in the music. It's kind of hard to explain but. . . you can tear the backs off them and not even know the name of the books and start singing songs out of them and you'd just tell the difference in the type of music. . . . In other words, Stamps had their crew of men and women that wrote songs; their ideas were pretty much the same thing, you know. Vaughan's the same way. . . . My dad, and I did too, I like them. Might be because I used it more than anything.<sup>21</sup>

During another interview, Dye said he felt that, compared to the Vaughan songbooks, the Stamps books had more quartet songs and were written in a lower key more suitable for all-male quartets. Critiques of the two companies by singers are always varied, however, but a mixture of loyalty and aesthetic judgement are usually present in the comments.

The Vaughan and Stamps-Baxter Companies are not the only gospel songbook publishers used by churches in rural southcentral Kentucky. R. E. Winsett of Dayton, Tennessee, has published convention books, radio songbooks, and church songbooks for many decades and has had a following in southcentral Kentucky, especially east of Bowling Green around Adair County where his church books are widely used. A songbook series called Songs of Inspiration, until recently published by the Benson Company of Nashville, has also been widely used in the region. New Songs of Inspiration Number 12 has recently been released, and in the last few months

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<sup>21</sup>Edwin Dye, 12-11-84, Side 1, 083.



a Bowling Green Christian bookstore has filled several large orders from rural churches for the new collection.<sup>22</sup> The Broadman Publishing Company, also of Nashville, is the major large hymnbook company that has supplied hymnals to rural churches in the area. Often churches have both hymnals and smaller gospel songbooks in their pews. One other book series well-received by many rural churches is connected with the Mull Singing Convention radio program. The Tennessee Music Company in Cleveland, Tennessee, publishes the series for the Mulls, who host the gospel radio programs. Mull Singing Convention Number 4 has recently been released.<sup>23</sup> Literally dozens of other publishing companies are represented in the homes of rural southcentral Kentucky, but Stamps-Baxter and Vaughan are the only ones which have enjoyed book sales into the millions.

Independent small songbook publishing companies still exist but the majority of the market is controlled by Zondervan Corporation which currently owns publishing rights to the songbooks of Stamps-Baxter and the Songs of Inspiration series. A subdued fear that the corporation might try to monopolize the gospel songbook market has been expressed by some of my informants. The Tennessee Music Company, which currently publishes the Vaughan songbooks and the Mull Singing Convention songbooks, plus many other religious music books, appears to be prospering also.

I have presented this brief look at the songbook publishers

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<sup>22</sup>W. Elmo Mercer, comp., New Songs of Inspiration Number 12 (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter of the Zondervan Corporation, 1984).

<sup>23</sup>J. Bazzell Mull, Mull's Singing Convention Number 4 (Knoxville, Tennessee: Mull Singing Convention, 1982).

influential in southcentral Kentucky because an understanding of singing schools would be impossible without a rough knowledge of the publishers' activities. In a conversation with a singing school teacher, words such as "Stamps-Baxter," "Vaughan," "rudiments books," and "normals" would soon be heard. At a deeper level, the lives and careers of the singing school teachers were actually intertwined with the work of the songbook publishers. This relationship is apparent in several ways.

First, people who chose to devote much of their time and energy to gospel music, especially before the forties, would likely have hoped to progress through a series of career moves:

1. Attend singing schools, attend singings.
2. Sing with local quartets, lead singings.
3. Attend normal music schools.
4. Teach singing schools.
5. Teach in normals.
6. Write songs and articles for publishers.
7. Join staff or major publisher of fundamentalist college.
8. Own or manage gospel music company or organization.

This progression was certainly not engraved in stone. For example, a person might have taught a singing school or written a successful song without having attended a normal, or a person might have inherited the control of a company. Most singing school teachers, especially part-time ones, would not have advanced past the fourth career move, but for those teachers who hoped to make a full-time career out of gospel music, the job of singing school teacher might have been viewed as but one step toward a more secure profession. Now, the ultimate goal for people hoping to be successful in the gospel music industry is to be part of



a successful professional quartet; teaching singing schools is no longer seen as a necessary step in the ladder. But for over a hundred years, and probably still in some Southern communities, teaching singing schools was expected of people developing a career in the field of popular religious music, and involvement with a publisher was a major part of the career ladder.

Second, the success of the singing school teachers was often affected by the success of the songbook publishing companies with which they maintained working relationships. For example, C. E. DeWeese was gainfully employed during the forties and fifties during which time he assisted at Vaughan's normals and taught singing schools at churches which had contacted him because they had read his column in Vaughan's Family Visitor. But when the Vaughan Company began to experience declining sales in the late fifties and sixties, DeWeese was less able to find work.

Third, the singing school teachers, even the part-time ones, have been heavily influenced by the vocabulary, rules of music, order of teaching, styles of leading, and general teaching methods developed by the songbook publishers. "Rudiments" books used by these teachers were generally written by the staff of a publishing company, and the normals from which many teachers received their training were often taught by people closely connected with a publishing company. The musical ideas presented by these companies did not tend to stray significantly from the long-standing rules of Southern popular religious music, however, because the companies were generally staffed by Southern singing school teachers. But the publishers clearly had great power to change the tradition, and occasionally they did, if only in small ways.

Finally, the singing school teachers valued the family quality of the publishing companies. Teachers did not simply feel as though they were on their own against the musically untrained public, but they felt part of a team in which loyalty and fraternity were important. They appreciated the commissions and advice of the publishers, and they admired their skills, but perhaps most of all they appreciated the words of encouragement and thanks from the publishers. Only the publishers were in a position to judge the teachers' work on a broad scale and say, "good job."



### CHAPTER THREE

#### SINGING SCHOOL STYLES

The skills of singing gospel music are not taught in any rural religious events to the extent they are taught in singing schools. In this chapter, I will describe these school in more detail, particularly their format and diversity. This goal is a formidable one, and I will present only a summary. A full ethnography in which the terms and customs of the singing schools were evaluated would be book length; much of the terminology in the "rudiments" books alone is unique to Southern singing schools. But a thorough examination of the particular theoretical and semantic aspects of the tradition is not crucial to the development of the central theme in this thesis, which is the interdependence of gospel music institutions. First, I will describe my personal experience at a singing school taught by C. E. DeWeese in Edmonson County, Kentucky, from September 24 to October 5, 1984. My account of this particular singing school will serve as a springboard toward a discussion of various aspects of the regional singing school tradition.

#### C. E. DeWeese's Singing School at the Pine Grove United Baptist Church

Having been directed to DeWeese as a person who would be helpful in my research, I called him at his home in Chalybeate Springs, Logan County, Kentucky, and discovered that he was preparing to begin the second week of a singing school at the Pine Grove United Baptist Church in the southwest corner of Edmonson County. He invited me to come and told me

the classes were to be held from 7:00 to 9:00 each weekday evening. The following notice appeared in the September 27, 1984, issue of the weekly Edmonson News:

**SINGING SCHOOL**

A singing school is now in progress at Pine Grove United Baptist Church, just off Hwy. 743. It will begin at 7 nightly. Everyone is invited to attend. C.E. Deweese will be the instructor.

Fig. 8. Announcement of DeWeese's singing school.

The church is located in a rural area, and the congregation is comprised of farming families. The building itself is not more than a decade old, but the original Pine Grove Church was established in 1932. No organs, pianos, or other musical instruments are played in the building, and at least some of the members prefer to keep them out. When I asked the gathering if I could tape record the singing school, some people consented but others were uncomfortable with the idea and expressed a pride that a microphone had ~~never~~ been used in the sanctuary. I did not record.



Fig. 9. Pine Grove United Baptist Church

In this particular church, services were held on the second Sunday night of each month at 7:00, the fourth Saturday night at 7:00, and the fourth Sunday morning at 11:00. Every Friday night, however, a choir practice was held, which demonstrates the importance of gospel music singing to the church members. During regular church services,



the choir members sat out with the rest of the congregation when they were not singing. Often, A large percentage of the church's congregation would sing with the choir. Most of the participants in the singing school were members of the choir. The songleader for the church was, although an enthusiastic singer, not skilled at reading music, a situation DeWeese claims is common among rural churches today.

In July, 1984, church leaders decided in their monthly business meeting to ask DeWeese to teach a singing school. One or two of them had attended a DeWeese singing school in 1983 at the Midway Church in Edmonson County, and they were enthusiastic about having a school at Pine Grove. They even built a large wooden tripod especially for DeWeese's blackboard. A fee for the singing school was arranged between DeWeese and the church.

The sessions followed a relatively unchanged format throughout the ten-day school except for the Friday class in which a "singing" was held. The first few days were somewhat different from the others in that DeWeese spent time trying to understand the particular needs and strengths of the church's singers. For example, he was made aware that the skills of songleading would need to be emphasized throughout the school. He did not separate the singers into the four voice groups until late in the first week when they had become comfortable singing together. But the general schedule of events each evening did not vary substantially.

A few minutes before 7:00 each evening, most of the class of twenty to thirty people was socializing inside the church or out on the front yard. Women slightly outnumbered men, and the age of the

students ranged from teenagers to retired people. At around 7:00, a church leader stood at the front of the sanctuary and suggested the session begin. Songbooks were passed out and people settled into their seats. After the class had been separated into voice groups, the sopranos and altos, who were all women, sat in the left pews, and the tenors and basses, who were all men, sat in the right pews.

This church leader welcomed everybody, expressed appreciation to DeWeese for coming, and led the congregation in one or two songs. Following the songs, he gave an emotional speech concerning the joys of singing and of being saved, and then he called on everyone to pray. The participants got down onto their knees--some of them bowed to the floor--and began praying aloud with intense and tearful emotions. Within five minutes, they had one by one finished their prayers, leaving the church leader who initiated the prayer to pray alone. He continued for ten or twenty seconds and then brought his prayer to a close, at which time everyone rose back into the pews.

After this prayer, DeWeese stepped to the front and expressed his greetings. He thanked the students for coming and invited everyone to bring family and friends to the next session. (Attendance decreased slightly as the school progressed.) Among his tools of the trade were a pointer, a collapsible blackboard, chalk, and a pitch pipe for pitching the songs. The

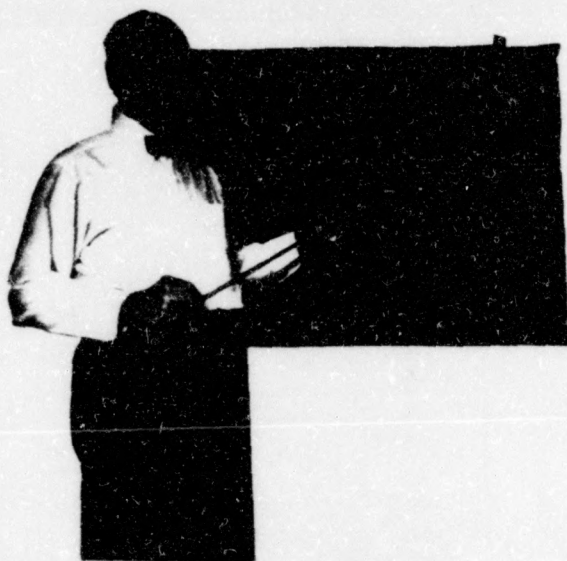


Fig. 10. C. E. DeWeese with pointer and collapsible blackboard, 1984.



congregation had purchased copies of Vaughan's Up-To-Date Rudiments and Music Reader, Revised and Enlarged at the beginning of the school, along with copies of a 1977 Stamps-Baxter songbook entitled Gospel Songs of Cheer.<sup>1</sup> Although the songbook was not the most current one, DeWeese knew that the songs in it would be unfamiliar to the congregation, which is most important.

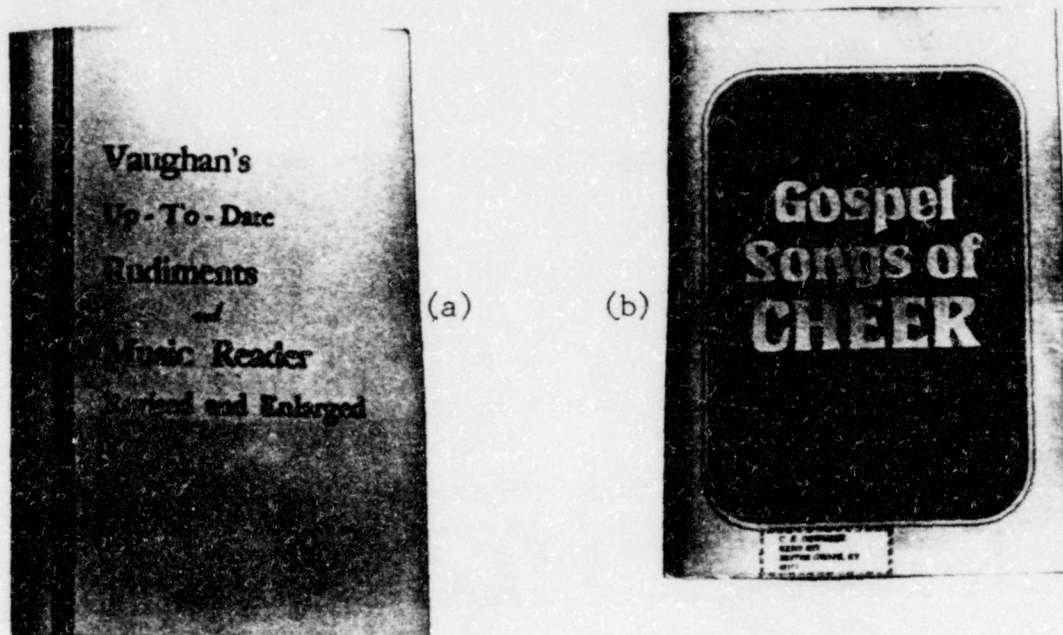


Fig. 11, (a) and (b). The title pages of "rudiments" book and songbook used by DeWeese at a 1983 singing school in Edmonson County.

In addition to teaching lessons concerning the skills of reading shape-note music, he also talked about more subtle aspects of singing gospel music. For example, the statement that "the message and the occasion should govern the speed of a song" was emphasized every night.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Adger M. Pace and W. B. Walbert, Vaughan's Up-To-Date Rudiments and Music Reader, Revised and Enlarged (Cleveland, Tennessee: James D. Vaughan, 1951); Gospel Songs of Cheer (Dallas, Texas: Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>C. E. DeWeese, Chalybeate Springs, Kentucky, 10-15-84, Side 1, 569.

He suggested that articulation was extremely important and that if the words of a song were not heard, singing was useless. Also, he suggested that songs sung during more solemn occasions such as invitations and funerals should be slow, and perhaps not led at all, while songs sung during the major portions of the worship service should be happy and more positive. As for pronunciation, he stated that the words of songs should always be pronounced as they were in everyday speech.

At least once every evening during the second week, DeWeese invited participants up to practice leading the group in singing. He often pointed out that one of the major purposes of a singing school was to train songleaders to be more effective. Following such an invitation, one or two people stepped up to the front and used arm motions to beat the time of the song. Many of the other participants practiced the arm motions where they sat. The three basic arm motions taught by DeWeese were the following:

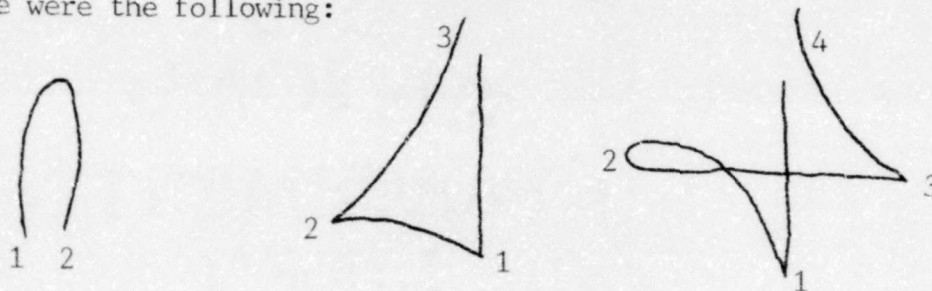


Fig. 12. Three basic arm motions for leading.

He beat time along with these student leaders, and his flowing, elaborate motions contrasted with those of the beginners.

At about 8:50, DeWeese concluded his lessons for the evening and called on the students to pick up their songbooks. Three or four songs were sung with various people leading. Usually, the class remained seated while they sang, but occasionally someone suggested that everyone



stand up and everyone did. Following the songs, DeWeese instructed a church leader to "take over." This church leader thanked DeWeese for coming and assured him they were all trying their best. A closing prayer was given and the session was over. Most people socialized for ten or fifteen minutes before leaving.

The Friday session on the second week was completely different from the other sessions. Throughout the ten-day school, DeWeese mentioned that the final Friday of the school would be a "singing" where students could take turns leading. On Thursday night, he distributed strips of paper and suggested that everyone who wanted to lead a song on Friday write his or her name on a slip and give it back to him. He also mentioned that he would be bringing three people who sang with him in a gospel quartet called the Sacred Singers as his special guests, and he invited all participants to bring family and friends to this final session.

After the regular opening prayer ceremony on this Friday, the students who had signed up on Thursday to be leaders were called upon one by one by DeWeese to lead a song of their choosing. If two or more people had each planned to lead a particular song, the gathering simply sang that song several times during the evening. After an hour and a half or so, all the student leaders had led a few songs and no other singers responded to DeWeese's invitation to lead. At that time, DeWeese and his three friends, two men and a woman, stepped up to the podium and sang quartet songs for about twenty minutes. They read from shape-note songbooks, and one of the songs was written by DeWeese. Although they mentioned that they preferred playing with a piano--the woman usually played piano and sang--they sang acappella because no

piano was available.

The closing, which was usually short, lasted about thirty minutes on the final Friday. It began when DeWeese expressed appreciation to the church and made other closing remarks. Then many people spoke, while weeping, of their appreciation of DeWeese. These speakers, who were mostly men, ended their thankful remarks by walking up to the teacher and shaking his hand. DeWeese responded with quiet thanks. After six or eight people had spoken in this manner, the women who were all seated on the left pews began to walk up in a line to shake hands with DeWeese and with the men who were near him. After a period of much handshaking, a closing prayer was given and the class disbanded.

The other singing school teachers I interviewed in southcentral Kentucky conducted their schools in a format similar to that of DeWeese. Their sessions followed the same basic order of events: introduction, songs, prayer, lessons, songs, closing remarks, and prayer. Diversity does exist, however, and I will use DeWeese's school as a model from which to compare and contrast the different ways singing schools have been conducted. The information for this comparative study has been drawn from personal interviews, articles, observations at two singing schools, and William Rush McDonald's 1971 collection of thirty narratives on Hart County singing schools.<sup>3</sup>

#### Organizing the Singing Schools

Several of the church leaders at the Pine Grove Church had previously attended one of DeWeese's singing schools, so they were aware of

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<sup>3</sup>William Rush McDonald, "Singing Schools" (Western Kentucky University Folklife Archives MSS number 1971-103).



the logistics and formalities involved in setting up a school. A church which had no members familiar with the workings of a singing school would need to inquire about issues such as where to have it, when to have it, who to invite to teach, how much to pay him, how to raise the money, and generally how to prepare for the school. In this section, I will discuss these logistical issues.

In the last fifty years, singing schools in southcentral Kentucky have virtually always been held in churches, but before World War II they also occurred in schoolhouses, homes, general stores, and lodges. John R. Graham writes that in the Cumberland Mountains, which border southcentral Kentucky on the east, some turn-of-the-century singing school teachers used school buildings most often "since they were more abundant than churches, and often served as churches on Sunday."<sup>4</sup> In southcentral Kentucky, Edwin Dye remembers that the first singing school he attended was in a Butler County schoolhouse in the thirties, but he adds that every singing school he has attended since then has been held in a church. I have not found proof that singing schools in southcentral Kentucky were ever held in lodges, but lodges in nearby regions have hosted these schools. Chester Whitescarver recalls an Ohio singing school he attended in a lodge, and Annie Fellows Johnston, in her autobiography Land of the Little Colonel, recalls a singing school she attended in Oldham County, Kentucky, in the 1860s held in an Odd Fellows Lodge.<sup>5</sup> Most likely, the singing school/lodge connection

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<sup>4</sup>Graham, "Early Twentieth Century Singing Schools," p. 82.

<sup>5</sup>Chester Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 660; Annie Fellows Johnston, The Land of the Little Colonel, (Boston: L. C. Page and Company, 1929), p. 55.

has existed in southcentral Kentucky. Summarizing how the location of a singing school was determined in Hart County during the early 1900s, Mrs. J. B. Reynolds of Munfordville, Hart County, Kentucky, says, "The men folk picked the spot for the school. We could use the school, the meeting house, or the general stores. Whichever one was the easiest to get to was picked."<sup>6</sup>

The buildings that house singing schools are usually rural and relatively simple. Electricity did not begin to reach rural people in southcentral Kentucky until the late 1940s, and most rural churches today still lack plumbing facilities. Some of the particular problems associated with singing schools in their rural settings are described in the following narratives collected by McDonald from Mrs. J. B. Reynolds:

If the school was held in the summer, the windows and doors were left open. You should have seen the bats and candleflies flying around. We spent about as much time fighting those varmints as we did singing. We women folk really shied away from those bats.

When the singing school was held in the fall, wood fires were started in the sheet iron stoves. Some of the men folk held a working and got wood for the church. Each evening Uncle Will Stasel went to the meeting house and kindled the fires. As the heat went into the attic, the wasps got warmed up and came down on the singers and on lookers. Many a fair lass was scared out of her wits by the falling wasps.

The building was lit with coal oil lamps. These lamps hung on the wall on wooden pegs. There were reflectors on the backs of the lamps. Some of the singing folks held lamps in their hands so they could see to read the music. I remember one night Uncle Will Stasel snatched one of the lights from the wall and pitched it outside. It had caught on fire and would have blowed up.<sup>7</sup>

A 1929 Louisville Courier-Journal article on singing schools tells of when "the old-time singing school assembled at 'early candle light' and

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<sup>6</sup>McDonald, "Singing Schools," p. 9. Reynolds was 84 years old in 1971.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 9, 11, 12.



each individual was supposed to bring his or her own candle."<sup>8</sup>

A consensus exists among my informants that the heyday of singing school activity occurred around the 1930s, but opinions vary as to when in the year, during that heyday period, the schools were usually held. Chester Whitescarver suggests they were usually taught before crops were in and after they were out, in early spring and late fall. Edwin Dye, on the other hand, believes most schools were held in the summer. C. E. DeWeese taught schools year-round and he has stories of schools he taught in the middle of the winter where churches were filled with students every session. Mrs. J. B. Reynolds explains that "the time of year to hold a school was picked so that it would not bother the men and their farm chores. Neither hell nor high water bothered the men and their work. The school usually wound up being held in the summer or late fall."<sup>9</sup> Generally, singing schools that were held when farm work was not demanding, when the weather was not treacherous, and when a well-known teacher was in charge were probably the most well-attended. Concerning contemporary singing schools, because only one or two occur in a county every year, a determination of when in the year they are most popular is difficult to make. Early fall appears to be a favorite time.

Most often, the decision to have a singing school comes from the leaders of a particular church. They vote on which teacher to hire and give him at least a month's notice so he has time to order songbooks. Some churches, especially during the twenties and thirties, would sponsor

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<sup>8</sup>Louisville Courier-Journal, 27 January 1929.

<sup>9</sup>McDonald, "Singing Schools," p. 9.

singing schools every year and would make arrangements with teachers a year in advance. Back then, different churches in a county would plan together so no overlap would occur and so a different singing school could be taught in the region every month. The teachers I interviewed, both the amateur ones and the professional, expressed pride that they had seldom if ever tried to persuade a church or community to host a singing school; the churches had always invited them.

If the church treasury did not have enough money to pay the teacher, church leaders might work with the congregation to raise money before the teacher's arrival. For example, Mrs. Donald McDonald of Hardyville, Hart County, Kentucky, explains:

The fee of the singing teacher was determined, and each family assumed his responsibility for paying the fee according to the number of students that family enrolled in the school. Occasionally, the community would hold a pie or box supper and use the proceeds from these activities to meet the financing of the singing school.<sup>10</sup>

Pay for singing school teachers has varied. During the thirties and forties, the round figure of \$50.00 was generally used in the Logan County area. One Hart County resident refers to a teacher, apparently from the early 1900s, who only charged twelve to fifteen dollars.<sup>11</sup> In the fifties and early sixties, when some county conventions were helping to sponsor singing schools, a teacher earned roughly \$150.00 for a two-week school. A sliding scale has always existed, however. A well-known teacher can ask more than a part-time local teacher, and a local teacher might teach for free. Chester Whitescarver asks \$200.00 plus gas money for schools he teaches today, but he is proud that he never made a church

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 10.



pay anything:

I teach some, sometimes, because a church needs it and they're not financially able. I'll just teach them a school. I don't ask them for anything. If they feel able to give anything to kindly help out on the gas, okay. . . . I consider it the work of the Lord and I don't mind giving it.<sup>12</sup>

Mrs. Blennie Burd of Hardyville recalls a teacher she knew in the 1910s, Noble Cottrell, who had an attitude similar to that of Whitescarver:

"He didn't charge us anything. Oh, if someone wanted to give him something he'd take it, but Bro. Cottrell just loved to sing."<sup>13</sup> Edwin Dye

charges \$200.00 today but in the early fifties he only charged \$50.00.

C. E. DeWeese charges approximately \$350.00 today, up from about \$130.00 when he started teaching in the late thirties. DeWeese, who has been a professional singing school teacher for much of his life, believes that students learn more when a singing school teacher charges a fee.

Teachers have also been able to earn money selling songbooks. For example, DeWeese always had his trunk full of songbooks when he was a traveling singing school teacher in the fifties. In addition to selling songbooks and "rudiments" books to students, he was often able to outfit a church with new church songbooks. From each sale, DeWeese earned a small commission. Some teachers, however, such as Chester Whitescarver, have adopted a policy to sell songbooks at the wholesale cost charged to them by the publishers.

The qualifications of singing school teachers have been quite varied. Even among singing school teachers, a diversity of opinions exist concerning the credentials a singing school teacher should have.

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<sup>12</sup> Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 445.

<sup>13</sup> McDonald, "Singing Schools," p. 15.

For example, Whitescarver believes that if a man is a talented singer and communicator he can teach. DeWeese believes, on the other hand, that a person should be trained at a good normal music school before considering himself a singing school teacher. He adds that men are generally better teachers, and that he has only known of two or three women singing school teachers in his entire life.

Less well-known or novice teachers have been known to set up their own schools by getting subscriptions from residents in rural areas where singing schools were not common. Mrs. J. B. Reynolds recalls one itinerant singing school teacher she knew when she was twelve: "This singing school teacher looking like the fragments of hardtimes came through the country. He wanted to teach a school, so he put up in Uncle Logsdon's cabin and carried on a singing school."<sup>14</sup> Another women, Jean Thomas, describes in her somewhat romanticized account of mountain life, Blue Ridge Country, a Kentucky singing school teacher who "journeyed hither and yon to take up a subscription for singing school. . . [and tried] to get the consent of school trustees and elders in order to hold forth in Bethel church house. Honor-bound too, was he, to divide his fee of a dollar per scholar with his benefactors."<sup>15</sup> The practice among teachers of charging admission and paying rent on a building seems to be unheard-of in southcentral Kentucky (except for normal schools), but it was common enough in the South to cause J. R. Baxter to write an article in Gospel Music News on how a school is "made" by

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>15</sup>Jean Thomas, Blue Ridge Country (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1942), p. 123.



using subscriptions and tuitions.<sup>16</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum are those teachers who have been enormously respected in an area and who have been in great demand. One of the most respected teachers in southcentral Kentucky was the late Jim McKinney. He was one of the few teachers who earned most of his income by teaching singing schools within a few southcentral Kentucky counties. From the twenties until his death in the sixties, he taught singing schools in the region. He is remembered as a demanding but thorough teacher who possessed unparalleled talent. Among the stories told of him is Chester Whitescarver's narrative about his musical abilities:

They tell me. . . that he could take a new song, with two pages in the song, and by the time he would sing the first page all the way down, he would be reading the music a-way down on the other page. He was that good. . . . He had the largest voice range of any man I think I ever heard. He could sing that high alto part just like a woman or he could get the lowest bass; sing any part. It didn't make one bit of difference.<sup>17</sup>

The late Roy Stuart was considered one of the kindest singing school teachers in Logan County and was instrumental in the development of the Logan County Singing Convention. Two teachers from Tennessee were also especially respected in southcentral Kentucky. J. C. Haliburton was so liked that when a group of Logan County residents moved to Ohio to work in the 1940s, they asked him to make a trip up to teach a school for them. Everett Jewell Butrum, who played piano for the John Daniels Quartet, had a large following in southcentral Kentucky. Both these Tennessee teachers died within the last few years. Mrs. Willie McCoy of Forestville, Hart County, Kentucky, describes her favorite singing

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<sup>16</sup>J. R. Baxter, Jr., "This and That," Gospel Music News 20 (July 1954):2.

<sup>17</sup>Whitescarver, 11-9-83, Side 1, 482.

school teacher, Lon Craddock, in the following passage: "He traveled all over the country on foot singing at revivals, conventions, and funerals. He had trained his eyes until he was able to read four lines of music at a glance."<sup>18</sup>

Full-time singing school teachers have generally stayed in the homes of church members while the taught, whereas part-time teachers have preferred to teach only in nearby churches to which they can commute. Mrs. Donald McDonald explains the situation as follows:

The singing teacher was usually an individual who had other employment that he was engaged in during the day, and frequently he had no means of travel but to go by foot. He would walk across the hills and hollows taking the best short cut to the community that had hired him. Occasionally, a teacher would go into a community for a period of two weeks and live among his students while he was teaching the school.<sup>19</sup>

Of the three singing school teachers I interviewed, two have only taught part-time at a local level, preferring to commute, and one has taught full-time, preferring to live with students or in his travel trailer.

Singing schools usually last ten days and are held in the evening, but exceptions exist. Edwin Dye prefers to teach eleven-day schools with a singing on the Saturday of the second week. L. E. Butrum writes in 1915 (see page 53) of his twelve-day schools; he probably taught weekdays and Saturday for two weeks. If interest in a singing school was particularly high, the school might continue for weeks beyond the first ten days. C. E. DeWeese recalls a time he taught a lengthy school in the mountains of Virginia:

I taught in a small church up in Virginia, went there for two weeks, and there was so much interest, and there was so many coming in from

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<sup>18</sup> McDonald, "Singing Schools," p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 34.



different churches, at the end of the first week, they said, "Well, could you stay an added week? Make it three weeks?" I said, "Yes." And at the end of the next week, they said, "Well, could you stay another extra week?" I said, "Yes." I was there four weeks in a small church. . . . People would come from different communities. Songleaders would come from different churches and learn something about it. They were trying to be songleaders without knowing any music, of course.<sup>20</sup>

DeWeese knows of some teachers who teach in the daytime, but most simply teach for a couple of hours in the evening, starting at 6:30 or 7:00. Also, he knows of teachers who teach ten-day schools straight through starting on a Friday and ending on a Sunday in order to teach a singing school without missing more than one work week.

When a singing school is going to be held in a community, the news generally travels by word of mouth. Occasionally, an announcement appears in a newspaper, but most often no written announcement is made. Church leaders simply announce the coming of the singing school teacher to their congregations and the news disperses throughout the community. For this reason, although everyone is invited to attend singing schools, the public not connected with rural church activities is often unaware of the singing schools in the region.

#### Social and Religious Aspects

The popularity of singing schools in the first half of the twentieth century was caused by more than a growth in interest in singing new songs. For some rural communities in southcentral Kentucky, the events were major social occasions and were much needed diversions from the normal daily routine. Chester Whitescarver describes how singing schools used to be among the major community events in Logan

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<sup>20</sup> DeWeese, 10-8-84, Side 1, 310.

County:

My mother and my dad, I've heard them talk about how they would go to singing schools, and how everybody would go. Then, they didn't have anyplace to go, and they were anxious to go. They had nothing to entertain them at home like they have now. . . and it was like that when I was growing up.<sup>21</sup>

Because of the religious nature of singing schools, community members generally approved of them as acceptable social events for young people, and much courting occurred.

Attendance at a singing school usually began to decline after the first few days. On the first day, people in a community would often attend whether or not they liked to sing. They would want to see the teacher and to show their community spirit, but only the most interested students would come every night. Whitescarver estimates that in his schools an average of thirty-five to forty people of all ages attended the first few sessions, but that rarely did twenty people last the full two weeks. The final singing of a school would generally be well-attended. DeWeese spoke of schools he led in which two or three hundred students were present, but these schools are exceptions. Often, fewer than a dozen students will attend a school.

At some schools, a small group would not enter the building but would sit outside. The following narratives from Hart County residents illustrate why.

The entire community came when the church doors opened because the location was the focal point for social gatherings. Some of the men never came in the church while others came in for only a short time. Then the men waited outside the church for their favorite girl.

Other people attended to be entertained, to watch the progress of their children, to feel a sense of pride in a community's progress, and to overcome the everyday routine. Still another group came and

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<sup>21</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 616.



never entered the building but stood outside and listened at the raised window or open door.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps many of the people who sat outside did not enjoy singing or were not confident they had musical abilities.

Singing school teachers I interviewed emphasized that school sessions have always been taken seriously by their students, but the social and courting aspects of the schools have clearly been important. William McDonald's Hart County informants often recalled the trip to and from the schools more than they did the school itself. For example, Mrs. Willie McCoy relates the following accounts:

At the singing schools, there was a great deal of courting. From the school, a young man would walk his favorite girl home. Frequently the girl would forsake her steady beau for a new fellow or a boy would forsake his steady girl for a new girl. This practice was called getting beat. It was very common and became the conversation of the community. Frequently fights ensued.

I went in the buggy to the singing school. My two older sisters and my brother walked, but my twin sister and I rode in the back of the buggy. I remember one evening when my mother had my twin and me to walk home with my older sisters and their boyfriends, so we could chaperon them.<sup>23</sup>

Edwin Dye recalls a time when young men would walk home from the schools leading their horses and holding the arms of their girlfriends; the girls' dresses were too long to allow them onto the horses. Mrs. Blennie Burd recalls the happiness associated with meeting as a community:

Everyone walked to the singing school at Richardson. We carried our old lanterns and tramped through the mud. We didn't mind the mud or the dark because when the whole community came together, there was a good spirit. Of course, the old building leaked. I remember seeing the water run down the teacher's head as he helped us sing. You see, everybody was happy when we came together to sing.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>McDonald, "Singing Schools," pp. 22, 33.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 24, 23.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

For some singing school students, learning new songs was clearly secondary to being part of a community event.

Religion was also influential in attracting people into singing schools. The previous chapters have established that these schools were intertwined with conversion-centered religion, and many people probably attended these schools as much to experience religious excitement as to learn music. Also, students felt at ease attending singing schools because the format of the schools was similar to that of the other church events with which they were familiar.

The levels at which religious ideas are brought into a singing school are determined to a large extent by the teacher. DeWeese knows teachers who do not use prayer at all in their schools, but these teachers are in the extreme minority. The opening and closing prayers are standard parts of the singing school tradition. Other religious themes surface while a teacher is explaining which songs are appropriate for different church occasions, recalling personal experiences of a religious nature, or summarizing the messages in a song's lyrics. A teacher who did not occasionally bring religious messages into his sessions would no doubt cause scepticism to occur among some church members as to his religious sincerity.

C. E. DeWeese brought religion into his schools during the forties and fifties more than did most teachers. After the opening prayer of each session, a fifteen-minute devotional was led by a church member. Although DeWeese tried to keep it from taking too much time, the devotional was allowed to continue if "the spirit" was present. Occasionally, he says, the devotionals turned into emotional invitations,



and if they lasted too long, he simply extended the singing school session later into the night. DeWeese explains he adopted James D. Vaughan's philosophy that "there's always time for someone to be saved."<sup>25</sup>

Often churches would need to absorb other church events into the singing schools. Dye recalls, "Most churches have prayer meeting on Wednesday night, and then instead of having a prayer meeting they just have a short devotional and then go right into the singing school. Most churches do that."<sup>26</sup> The teachers who taught for ten days in a row would need to absorb the Sunday night service into the school.

Many teachers emphasize the religious part of singing schools not only in an effort to yield to a predetermined format but because they have maintained a long personal involvement with a broad range of activities and beliefs associated with rural fundamentalist churches. Two of the three singing school teachers I interviewed, DeWeese and Whitescarver, connect their initial interest in gospel music with the day they were saved. (The other teacher, Edwin Dye, was born into a gospel singing family.) Whitescarver says that after he became active in a church following his marriage, he wanted to attend singing schools as much as he could: "I wanted to sing like I wanted to live. I wanted to live right and I wanted to sing right."<sup>27</sup> DeWeese also began his interest in gospel music after his marriage. He explains, "Years ago, I didn't care anything about music at all. Didn't do any singing, until after I was saved in 1932, and I got interested in singing. It wasn't

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<sup>25</sup>DeWeese, 3-2-85, unrecorded interview.

<sup>26</sup>Dye, 2-1-85, Side 1, 034.

<sup>27</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 154.

very long until I wanted to attend a singing school."<sup>28</sup> Although hand-clapping is not encouraged by the singing school teachers, shouting during songs or religious messages is considered a positive sign that "the spirit" is working within the school.

For many students, religion is clearly an important part of the singing school tradition. The emotional prayers that begin each session, the exclamatory words of affirmation such as "amen" and "praise God" expressed when a religious point is made, and the testimonials that close out each school are among the means by which students can express their religious sentiments. Blennie Burd tells in the following narratives of the importance religion played for her in singing schools:

We had one school at my house. My house was full to the brim with people. We sang and then we prayed. One night there were seven professionals right at the foot of that bed. I was so thankful to feel the spirit and my soul felt God's glory. The Lord touches me through music. That is the reason I went to so many singing schools and let them have one at my house.

One night when I was coming home from singing school I was driving my old horse around the knob home. The Lord just came down and gloriously saved my soul and my soul was happified. You know the devil got after me that very night. I have been persecuted because I wouldn't get in line but I put the devil behind the door that night for good. More comes out of singing schools than singing.<sup>29</sup>

Because of the large role of religion in the singing schools, nonfundamentalist people who attend singing schools out of curiosity are generally not able to follow all the customs associated with them.

A sentiment exists among the gospel music enthusiasts I interviewed that religious songs should only be sung by people who are sincere about what they are singing. Whitescarver expressed this belief when he

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<sup>28</sup> DeWeese, 10-8-84, Side 1, 086.

<sup>29</sup> McDonald, "Singing Schools," pp. 20, 21.



states, "I didn't think that a person should really be singing gospel songs if he didn't live a good life. To me it was a mockery."<sup>30</sup> None of the teachers I interviewed were opposed to the performance of secular music--in fact they all sang secular songs and played secular music at times--but they unanimously agreed that many insincere performers try to cash in on the popularity of gospel music by singing it in inappropriate ways and at inappropriate times. For example, DeWeese believes:

Year's ago that's all they'd sing [country music], but now they see they can make some money on gospel records and they're going into that field, singing gospel, and gospel records, but in the Grand Ole Opry style, and they call it "country gospel," and I don't like it.<sup>31</sup>

My informants, who generally had strong ideas about which groups were sincere and which ones were not sincere, believe the popularity of gospel music has suffered tremendously because of the visibility of insincere gospel groups. Due in large part to this emotional issue, to call someone "a good Christian" ranks higher as a compliment than to say "he is a good teacher" or "he is a good gospel singer." When C. E. DeWeese was recalling memories of James D. Vaughan (see page 56), he speaks little of his abilities as a teacher and businessman but emphasizes again and again that he was a good, devoted, Christian man. In short, a person must be more than a good singer, or good teacher, to be accepted by fundamentalist religious groups as an active money-making gospel music performer or teacher.

As with any community tradition that has existed for many years,

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<sup>30</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 157.

<sup>31</sup>DeWeese, 10-15-84, Side 1, 560.

the singing schools are bound up in social and belief systems apart from the musical techniques taught. An analysis of any particular singing school in southcentral Kentucky would reveal information about a community's general religious and social structures.

### Teaching Methods

The teaching methods and music theory used by singing school teachers in southcentral Kentucky differ from those used by teachers of classical music. The three singing school teachers I interviewed agreed that, even beyond factors such as the use of shape-note notation, religious themes, and the ten-day format, differences in the classical and gospel musical systems exist. For example, DeWeese believes that, at a basic level, singing school teachers "try to teach them to pronounce their words correct, and clear, and distinct, where in the classical, it's hard to understand some of the words."<sup>32</sup> He continues to explain that the practice among classically-trained teachers of spreading one syllable or word through several measures is not used by singing school teachers. Although some Southern rural public schools before the 1950s used Vaughan's and Stamps-Baxter's songbooks, shape-note music and Southern religious music in general never held secure positions in public school systems or colleges.<sup>33</sup> The classical music traditions of the schools have been largely separated from the gospel music traditions of the rural churches.

Singing school teachers offer no grades and no diplomas, so students who find a school to be confusing, boring, unexciting, or

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<sup>32</sup>DeWeese, 10-15-84, Side 1, 560.

<sup>33</sup>Fleming, "James D. Vaughan," p. 93.



unhelpful have few reasons to return every night. To some extent, students might continue to attend because of community expectations, parental pressures, social opportunities, or the excitement of singing with a class at a convention or revival, but generally a teacher who cannot command the respect and attention of his students will not be successful regardless of his musical knowledge. A teacher might be strict or easy, patient or demanding, funny or serious, but he needs to have an ability to develop a rapport with his class quickly. DeWeese, during his most active years in the 1950s, was likely able to gain a large measure of respect and admiration in many areas simply because of his association with the James D. Vaughan Music Company. His articulate and authoritative lectures, plus his direct requests that everyone return to future sessions, contribute to making his drop-out rate relatively small. Whitescarver believes the key to a successful singing school is in making it enjoyable to the young students:

I try to go along with them. I try to be positive alright, but I try to remember that they are children and you've got to work with them. That's one fault that some teachers have. They get rough with them, you know, and that don't work. . . . You can drive them away like that. I try my best to make them like me right off the bat. . . . I would kid them and would ask, the first time we sung the music through, and I'd ask, "Now did anybody miss one?" Of course, most all the hands would go up, you know. "Well, we'll just have to do it over again." Like I said, I'd try to make it a pleasure with them, fun.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to being skilled in singing and knowledgeable about gospel music theory, singing school teachers need to maintain performance styles and communication skills through which they can respond to different groups with sensitivity and authority.

Four-part harmony has been a cornerstone of Southern gospel music

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<sup>34</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 2, 024.

for over a century, but in the first half of the nineteenth century, three-part harmony was also popular. In his 1891 Reminiscences of a Long Life, J. M. Pendleton recalls a singing school of the 1820s in Christian County, Kentucky, where three-part harmony was taught. (I present the following passage in its complete form because it represents the earliest description I have been able to find of a singing school in southcentral Kentucky.)

It was in my boyhood that I went with my sisters to a "singing school." I remember the teacher well. He was a large man and enjoyed in a high degree feelings of self-satisfaction. His musical abilities were not of the first order, but he thought they were and made his pupils believe it. The different parts of music he called "tenor, treble, and base." To show us what he could do, he sometimes sang what he termed "counter." Seats were so arranged that he could stand and walk between them. I thought it the wonder of wonders that he could sing any part he pleased. He could help the tenor bench and in a moment go to the failing treble, giving it more life, and pass to the drawling base which badly needed assistance. We had small "singing books," which contained what were called "patent notes," and we sang four tunes, "common, short, and long meter" with "sevens." Sometimes there was discord, and the teacher would stop everything by stamping the floor. Having explained the cause of the discord, he would require us to try again.<sup>35</sup>

According to the 1844 Sacred Harp, in a song written in three parts, the "base" was lowest, the tenor or air was in the middle, and the treble was highest.<sup>36</sup> The book states, however, that in a four-part song the order from lowest to highest is base, tenor, counter, and treble. Four-part harmony became the norm after the mid-nineteenth century, and since the late nineteenth century the terms bass, tenor, alto, and soprano have been used by all major Southern songbook publishers. In

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<sup>35</sup>J. M. Pendleton, Reminiscences of a Long Life (Louisville, Kentucky: Press Baptist Book Concern, 1891), pp. 19-20.

<sup>36</sup>B. F. White and E. J. King, The Sacred Harp (Philadelphia: S. C. Collins, 1860; facsimile ed., Nashville: Broadman Press, 1968), p. 9.



all-male quartets, the parts from low to high were generally referred to in terms of bass, second tenor, lead, and first tenor.

## GENERAL SCALE

(a)

(b)

Fig. 13, (a) and (b). The voice parts as they are explained in two different "rudiments of music" used by singing school teachers. (a) Three voice parts--Treble, Tenor, and Bass--are used in the Kentucky Harmony, 1816. (b) Four voice parts--Soprano, Tenor, Alto, and Bass--are used in Vaughan's Up-To-Date Rudiments and Music Reader, 1937.

In most of the nineteenth century oblong tunebooks, the tenor, or high men's part, carries the melody line, but in the late 1880s, when

smaller gospel songbooks were written, the melody line was transferred to the soprano, or high women's part, where it is today. Although this switch affected the location of the melody line in the singing school class and choirs, it had little affect on the voice arrangements for quartets, which were usually all-male or three males and one female. In these quartets, the soprano line is sung by a man who drops his part one octave which leaves the alto as the highest part. In a quartet with one woman, she sings the alto part, not the soprano. The effect of this lowering of the soprano part is that it kept the melody line in the middle voice range, much as it was represented in the early tunebooks. In twentieth century singing schools, however, the soprano is always sung by women.

In a typical singing school, sopranos outnumber the other parts, altos and basses rank second, and the tenors are the least numerous. The separating of the class into parts usually occurs after the first few sessions. Whitescarver explains his philosophy on this matter in the following narrative:

I wouldn't separate them the first day. Usually about the third lesson I'd try to get them together [into parts]. You see, we would. . . try to get them on the pitch and the time, and try to get them to observe their rests, and accidentals, the sharps and flats, try to get their attention to that. Then we would start singing. Now we wouldn't sing the words to the songs. We'd just sing the notes. . . . We'd all sing the soprano, then we would all sing the alto, and we would all sing the tenor, and we'd all sing the bass, trying to feel into them what their parts was.

Later in the interview, he explains:















After you get them acquainted with the scale, so that they know the shape of all the notes, know the name, can call the notes wherever they set, then you start them singing the scale to see where to place them, what part that they can sing.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 2, 183, 209.



Dye and DeWeese also separate their classes into parts after the first couple of days, but they emphasize that the exact time depends on the size of the class and the musical abilities of the students.

Shape-notes are usually, but not always, used by singing school teachers in southcentral Kentucky. The teachers I interviewed use shape notes, but they are all aware of regional teachers who prefer round notes. The history and nature of shape-note notation has received much attention, especially in the books of George Pullen Jackson, and need not be discussed in any detail here. Basically, in shape-note notation, shapes are used to help singers distinguish notes from one another. Between 1800 and the Civil War, the four-shape system was most widely used. In this system, the major scale was represented by the following shapes and syllables: fa , sol , la , fa , sol , la , mi . Since the Civil War, a seven-shape system in which the following shapes have been used has been most popular: do , re , mi , fa , sol , la , ti . All my informants prefer using shape-notes and can read round-note music only with difficulty, if at all. The lines and spaces of the music can almost be ignored by people reading shape-notes because the intervals are suggested by the shapes. Most "rudiments" books actually include exercises in which students are required to sing from lineless music. Teachers acknowledge, however, that piano or organ players need to be more acquainted with musical staves and round notes, unless they simply play by ear. Pianos are not always used in singing schools, especially in the schools of a few decades ago, and teachers often pitch the key note to the songs they lead with a tuning fork, a pitch pipe, or by ear.

Most teachers prefer to use new songbooks in their singing schools

because with them students are forced to develop their music-reading abilities faster than they would reading old song. Whitescarver describes this advantage in the following passage:

I never teach a school out of their hymnal that they use. You can't do that because they have been singing those songs for years and you can't change. . . . So much of the time they don't know it like it is, you see, and so when you start, when you teach a school, you start with a brand new book.<sup>38</sup>

DeWeese also uses new songbooks in his schools. Dye prefers to use recently published songbooks but not new ones. He likes to teach students songs they have previously heard but not yet learned. Occasionally, Dye will begin schools with familiar songs to warm people up; he believes older songs are generally better written than new ones. Mrs. Willie McCoy recalls that "during the singing school, the choir tried to learn one new song each evening."<sup>39</sup> With new songbooks, singing school teachers could both teach more effectively and introduce new singing material to the congregation.

Although the singing school teachers I interviewed try to use "rudiments" books in their classes, these books are neither crucial to the schools nor do they necessarily determine the order or nature of the lessons. Both Dye and Whitescarver have, within the last couple of years, taught singing schools in which no "rudiments" books were used; lessons were simply taught from the charts. When no time exists to order books or when a church cannot afford new books, teachers make do with what they have.

The teachers I interviewed all have slightly different

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<sup>38</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 394.

<sup>39</sup>McDonald, "Singing Schools," p. 25.



philosophies on how singing schools should be taught, and the use of charts in teaching is among the major issues around which different opinions revolve. C. E. DeWeese simply uses a collapsible blackboard with the lines of four musical staves permanently painted onto it, not really a chart at all. He describes his dislike for intricate charts

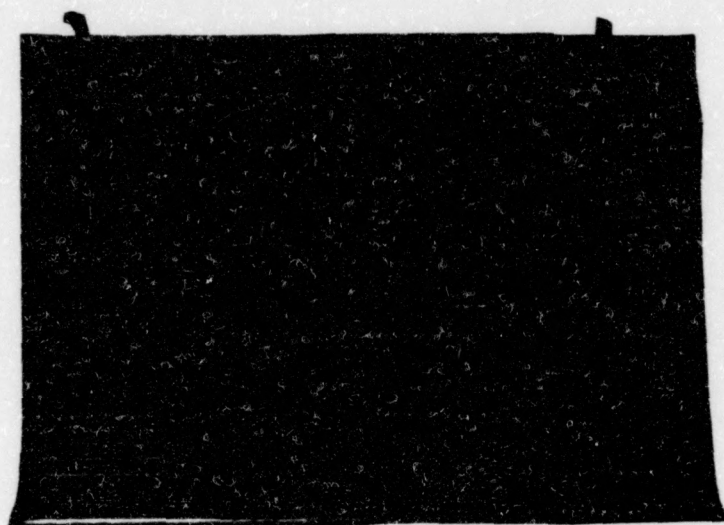


Fig. 14. DeWeese's blackboard.

when talking about singing school teachers active in the early decades of the 1900s:

Nearly all the teachers back then were just people who had attended a few schools and learned something about it, and they'd make them a chart. . . . I know some fellows in the county here that does a little teaching ~~once~~ in a while. They all use charts. I don't like the use of charts. Personally, I don't. I made a chart back when I first started teaching. I made me a chart, used it in one school. That's all. You've got all the work right before all the students all the time. Well, people will get confused--they see this and they see that--and they'll start asking questions about different things. Well, you see, if I don't have a chart, they don't know what to ask, so I control what I'm going to teach, and teach as the pupils are able to advance.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> DeWeese, 10-8-84, Side 1, 485.

Whitescarver uses a large wooden green chalkboard with many of the basic scales and rules of music painted on it. Two blank musical staves are

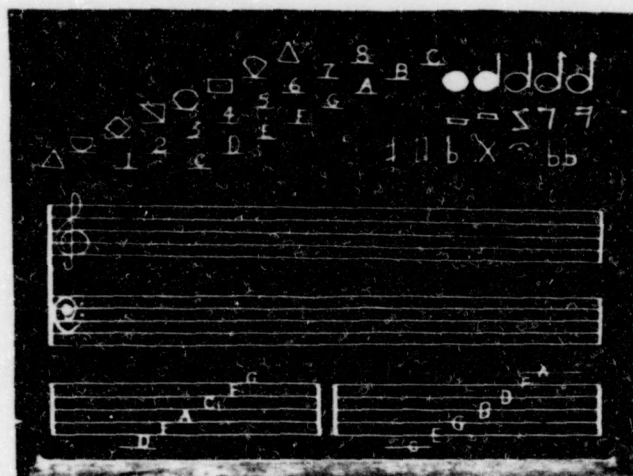


Fig. 15. Chester Whitescarver's chart blackboard.

printed on his board and on them he can illustrate particular points with chalk. Dye uses two pieces of muslin cloth on which he has painted his

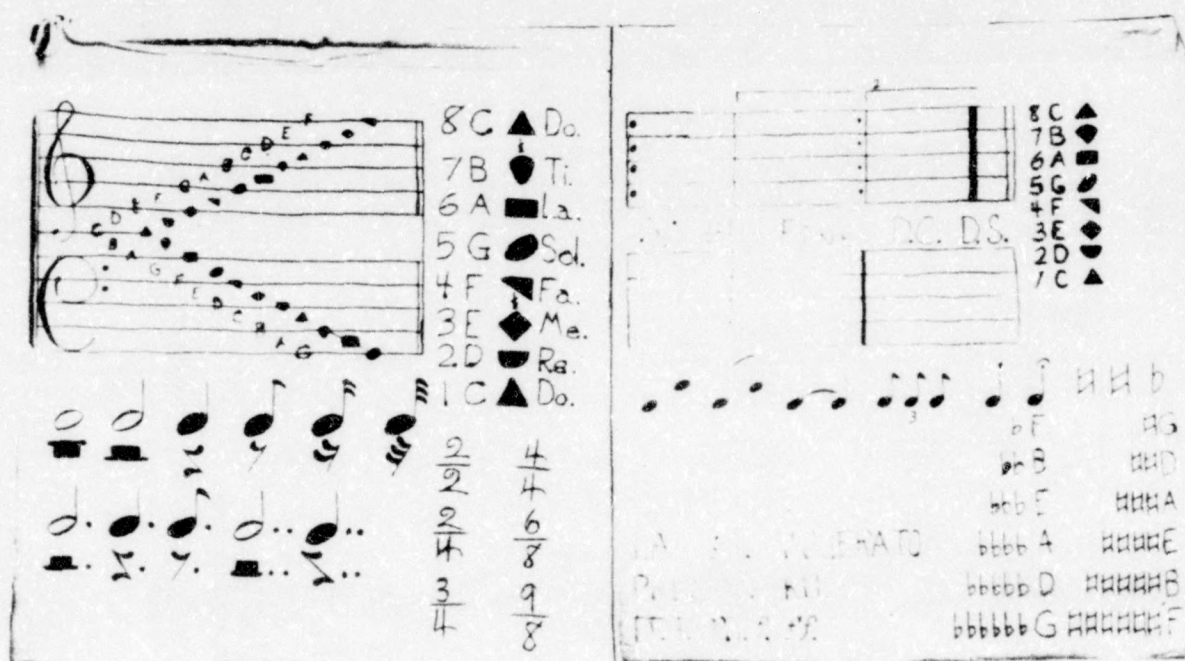


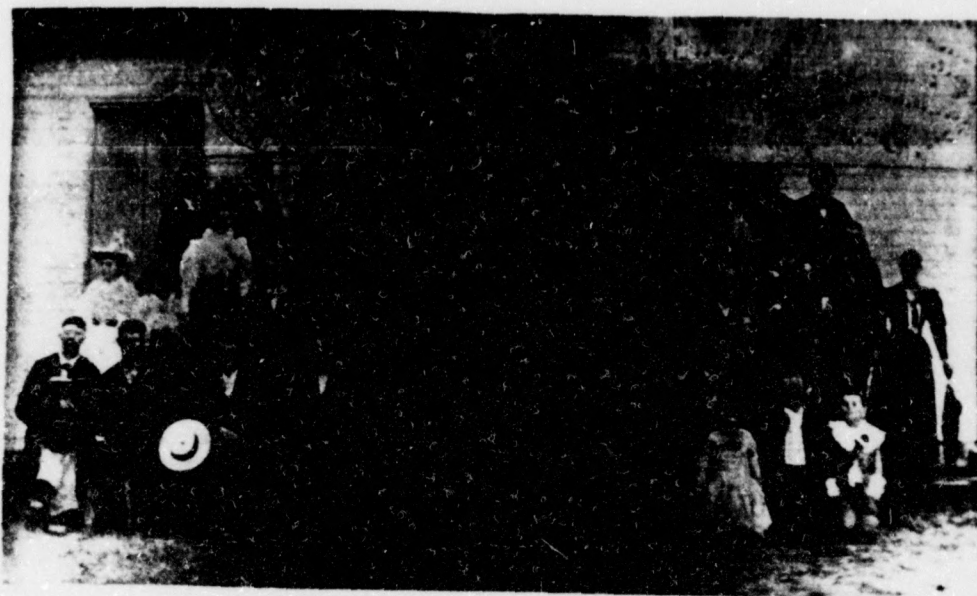
Fig. 16. Edwin Dye's charts.



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(a)



(b)

Fig. 17, (a) and (b). Charts used in Clay Neal's singing schools in Logan County, Kentucky, ca. 1890. Photographs from collection at the Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University.



rules of music. He is unable to use chalk or to otherwise add information to his chart while he is teaching. Both Whitescarver and Dye believed charts are an important tool in teaching, especially for drilling people on the scales. Dye believes charts have been underused by some professional singing school teachers:

They just didn't have the patience. Most of them would run over the chart. We used a chart that had. . . everything that you needed to know about it. They'd run over that chart real fast, and then they'd pick up the book and they'd start singing. And they might, on a song or two, run through the music on the song, but then they'd start teaching the songs. And when you left, you knew some new songs, but you hadn't learned a whole lot about music. Seems like they just didn't have the patience to really settle down and teach you.<sup>41</sup>

Teachers agree that illustrating musical concepts to students is helpful, but opinions vary concerning how to present these concepts.

General agreement exists among the teachers I interviewed that learning the shapes, the scales, and the time signatures is most important in singing schools, but subtle differences exist concerning which concepts should be emphasized. In the following passages, the three teachers give their thoughts on how a singing school should be taught. Whitescarver emphasizes drilling the students on musical concepts, especially scales:

The first thing you do is put your chart up, and you teach them all the notes. The first thing you do is to teach them to sing that scale, first. Teach them the shape note so that they know it wherever they see it. Teach them to sing it. And a good way--now the way that I taught, to me it's good but maybe the others don't think so--but I like to take the piano when I start teaching the scale. It helps the young ones so much, you see, if somebody hits each note to start them, and get them to where they can really pitch the note. You got to learn to pitch the note. There's two things has to register in your subconscious mind when you look at a note. You've got to think pitch and length. . . . Pitch: how high they go, how low.

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<sup>41</sup>Dye, 12-11-84, Side 1, 148.

Length is how long to hold or how quick to get away from, turn it loose. You cannot stress too much and teach too much that scale to begin with. In fact, I teach them, when I do teach, I go over that scale almost every lesson because you have different ones coming in all the time, you see. Now if everyone was there the first night and stayed all the way, it wouldn't be like that. . . . You've got to teach them, with your charts, you've got to show them what your sharps and flats, your rests. . . all these things, you've got to teach them what they are, the meaning of them. I'd go over that chart every night.<sup>42</sup>

Dye also emphasizes drilling the students with musical concepts illustrated on his chart:

First week, you drill a whole lot on the scale. Of course, you touch on the rest of it, and the timing. I like to start on that timing at the beginning of the school because you can't get too much on the timing. That's very important. If you can't keep time, you can't sing, regardless of how much you know about music. So I always drill a lot on the timing and the scale. That's the two things you've got to be able to do. You've got to be able to sound that note when you see it, the instant that you see it. If you don't, you've lost out, on a fast song especially. . . . I work all the way through the school on the timing, and the scale. . . . Of course, you go by the shape. . . . [Using a pointer, I would] skip around. When you first start out, you just go up and down on it. Then maybe after, along about the second or third night, you start skipping a little bit, and then each night you skip more, and then make it harder. Skip, do a lot of skipping. And I don't stop at, just go from do to do. I run it on up to maybe sol in the next octave, and then I'll come back down and start skipping around.<sup>43</sup>

DeWeese believes timing is the most important concept to teach. He also drills his students on the scales, but he believes timing is the most difficult concept for students to grasp. He teaches different time signatures in a certain order:

Well now, first week I taught simple time. I always teach the simple times, and there are nine different kinds of simple times. . . five in the compound time. But I never mix them. I always teach the simple times, finish with them, and then the process of going into the compound time.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 346.

<sup>43</sup>Dye, 2-1-85, Side 1, 185.

<sup>44</sup>DeWeese, 10-15-84, Side 1, 218.



Teaching people to be songleaders is an important part of singing schools. Jeff McKinney stated flatly that "singing schools was to teach teachers."<sup>45</sup> When a church has no songleader, singing school teachers train at least one person to be a leader so he can lead singings after the school is complete. The hand motions used to beat time for particular time signatures are not always identical between teachers. For example, for measures in which two beats are needed such as those with time signatures of 2/4 or 6/8, DeWeese beats down for each beat. But Whitescarver adheres strictly to the rule that the last beat of a measure should always be accompanied by an upward hand movement.



Fig. 18. Two ways to lead measures with two beats.

The vast majority of hand motions are standardized in "rudiments" books, however, and are well-known by singing school teachers.

The teachers I interviewed expressed concern and sadness about the present state of singing and songleading in area churches. DeWeese explains:

Many churches don't have a songleader at all. They just get somebody they think that's got a little talent. . . . I can think of different churches that they've got people that they don't know one note from another, just sing the older songs that they learned from somebody else.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup>McKinney, 9-14-83, Side 1, 356.

<sup>46</sup>DeWeese, 10-14-84, Side 1, 365.

Whitescarver recalls a conversation with a friend who asked him to help his congregation sing better:

[He] said something to me about he wished that I would teach their songleader in their church, that he had been put in. . . and he didn't know one note from another. But it was put on him. I mean he didn't ask for it. He didn't want it! It was just put on him; forced on him. Now in a case of that kind, they don't have good singing. And I don't mean that derogatory. I mean, you can't have it if you don't know how to read music. . . . I go places, in churches, and it's real amusing. When they start singing, well, somebody will get up and start waving his hand, and he don't even realize that you're supposed to beat time one certain way depending on the time of the song. They don't realize that, and then when they come to an alto lead, the men sing the alto right along with the women. . . . Well, you've got to have a leader that knows what he's doing.<sup>47</sup>

He explains later in the interview how pianists in rural churches today usually play by ear. Yet he believes, unlike Dye and DeWeese, that the current inability among many rural people to read music is due not from a lack of interest but from a lack of singing school teachers and a lack of funds in churches for sponsoring singing schools.

When questioned about how singing schools have changed in their lifetimes, the teachers agreed that very little change has occurred in the general format and teaching methods. Factors such as electricity, the growth of interest in automobiles, and the general decline of interest in singing gospel music have made some difference, but, on the whole, singing school teachers have not been subjected to major external pressures to change. If classically-trained music teachers have objected to the teaching methods used in singing schools, they have apparently chosen to ignore them or to discourage students from going rather than attempting to change the ways of the singing school teachers. Although teaching styles in singing schools have remained relatively unchanged

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<sup>47</sup>Whitescarver, 11-9-83, Side 2, 204.



through the years, the schools have been subjected to changes in public opinion concerning their usefulness as musical and educational institutions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SINGING SCHOOL TEACHERS:

#### THREE PROFILES

By presenting profiles of three singing school teachers, I hope to bring my study to a more personal level and to describe specific living patterns in which the data I have presented can be set. An awareness of how social, economic, and aesthetic factors have affected the development of the regional singing school tradition can be better sensed through an understanding of the lifestyles, beliefs, and musical attitudes of individual teachers.

Differences and similarities between the teachers will become more apparent in this chapter. For example, DeWeese's work as a full-time gospel music teacher contrasts somewhat with the part-time singing school work of the other two teachers. Also, Dye's active interest in a variety of secular musical styles contrasts with the musical interests of the other two teachers, who rarely sing nongospel songs. Many similarities exist, however. All three teachers have been singing in quartets for much of their lives, and they all have powerful and clear voices. Their accounts of how gospel music has developed and changed over the past five decades or so also follow a similar pattern.

The emphasis of these profiles will be on careers and on specific opinions concerning gospel music and singing schools. I will not duplicate materials covered in the previous chapters unless I am describing



specific series of events or developing a certain idea.

Although other singing school teachers are active in the south-central Kentucky region, these three teachers are the only ones I was able to locate and interview. Several of the most renown teachers in the region have died in the last few years. Clearly, a large number of singing school teachers lived in southcentral Kentucky a decade ago. The following people were mentioned to me by my informants as being among the other well-known regional singing school teachers they knew: Roy Stuart, Otis Spencer, Jim McKinney, Carlie Johnson, J. C. Haliburton, Glendel Groves, Golden Driskill, Taylor Chapman, Rayborn Campbell, Clarence Campbell, Everett Jewell Butrum, J. T. Blue, Ed Hudson, Hershel Dye, Rosco Reid, L. E. Hargis, and Johnny Martin.

Chester Whitescarver

Residence: Russellville

Logan County, Kentucky

Age: 71, born 1913

Religion: United Pentecostal

Occupation: Electrician

Chester Whitescarver did not begin to teach singing schools until after he was fifty years old, but he has loved singing since he was a child. He is repre-

sentative of most singing school teachers in that he was trained by local singing school teachers and has taught only as a sideline.



Fig. 19. Chester Whitescarver, 1984.

Teaching singing schools is part of his broad interest in evangelical activities, especially those related to singing. He began teaching mainly because rural church congregations in Logan County began asking him to organize singing schools for them.

Whitescarver was born in 1913 in Browder, Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, where his father was a coal miner. Except for three years as a teenager when he lived in Mississippi, and for the World War II years, Whitescarver has always lived around Muhlenberg and Logan Counties. Since his marriage in 1935, he has generally made Russellville his home.

His parents and brothers were all singers, and he grew up within a musical environment. He recalls how after dinner his relatives often sang around the organ when he was a boy, and how he always joined them. Their favorites were popular sentimental songs and love songs. He eventually developed a strong interest in playing the guitar and in singing the songs of Jimmie Rodgers and Gene Autry. When he was fifteen years old, he organized a band with a fiddler, mandolin player, and another guitarist besides himself. Although they were never paid, they were asked to play at many parties and picnics where they were well-fed.

During the thirties, he worked mainly as a farmer and a logger in Logan County. In 1942, he moved his family to Toledo, Ohio, where he worked in shops and gained experience in electrical wiring. After World War II, he came back to Russellville and began working as an electrician, first through a company and then in the late fifties as an independent contractor. Although retired since 1978, he continues to work as a state-approved electrical inspector.

Whitescarver was saved in 1945 after his return to Russellville.



He had always been involved in church life, however, and always knew he would eventually be saved when he settled down. Before this conversion experience, his desire to attend churches, revivals, conventions, and singing schools was linked more to an interest in socializing and in singing, he says, than in worshiping. Within a couple years after being converted, he joined the United Pentecostal Church of Russellville. His parents had always been loosely connected with General Baptist churches.

From a musical standpoint, his conversion marked a turning point in his life. Although he continued to sing some sentimental songs, he generally put aside Country-Western music for gospel music. He began to sing with local quartets and to attend every singing school that was held in the county. Eventually he became active as a songleader at churches and other religious events in the area.

Concerning the singing schools, he recalls how during the thirties and forties, they were plentiful and popular, even more so than revivals. During every warm-weather month, at least one school was usually being held in the county. All of the thirty or forty rural churches in Logan County sponsored singing schools at least once, according to Whitescarver. Plainview Church, he remembers, was probably the church that sponsored more singing schools than any other. They had one every year or two.

In addition to the singing schools, other church events such as Sunday Schools, homecomings or Old Folk's Days, dinners-on-the-ground, prayer meetings, revivals, and camp meetings include much singing. Whitescarver was, and continues to be, among the songleaders at these events who would take turns leading the congregation in a couple songs.

During the late forties, he became the lead singer for the Kentucky Harmonizers, a mixed gospel quartet that enjoyed substantial popularity for seven years. They sang regularly on a local radio program for four and a half years and were in great demand throughout the county. They entertained at churches, lodges, picnics, homecomings, reunions, revivals, and, most of all, funerals. The quartet turned down an offer from a funeral director who wanted to hire them to sing at all his funerals. They also turned down an offer from a man who wanted to manage them as a professional touring quartet. Because all the members of the group worked full-time in nonmusical careers, they chose to keep their singing activities a sideline. Whitescarver recalls that singing at funerals was often difficult because mourners occasionally neglected to thank them for coming, and they were seldom paid. Generally, a collection would be taken up wherever they sang, but the money did little more than help with gasoline expenses. On their most successful concerts, they only made about twenty dollars. Eventually, the quartet disbanded because the demands of singing in the group were too great for the members to accommodate. Even today, however, they occasionally get together and sing long into the night.

Whitescarver sang with the Royal Airs for a few years in the late fifties and early sixties, and has filled in for absent members of quartets through the years, but the Kentucky Harmonizers was the most successful of these groups. Reflecting on quartets in general, he believes quartets in the twenties and thirties were usually mixed, two males and two females, but when quartets began to travel more extensively, they became all-male. After the sixties, however, mixed quartets once again became popular.



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Fig. 20. Kentucky Harmoneers in the early fifties. Whitescarver is standing behind the woman.



Since his childhood, Whitescarver has always looked forward to attending the Logan County Singing Convention. In the late forties, the monthly singing convention, which was held in churches, and the semi-annual singing convention at the courthouse were both active. The two separate convention traditions existed side by side. Between the late forties and the eighties, Whitescarver was president of the monthly convention several times; three or four to the best of his recollection. It was a two-year position in the fifties but eventually it changed to a yearly one. During his earlier appointments as president of the monthly convention, a policy was adopted to invite only gospel groups from the county. Today, groups from other counties and states can perform there. His responsibilities as president included finding churches willing to host a convention and hiring one special group for each convention. He recalls that the conventions were much more lively in the thirties and forties than they are today. He explains:

At the end, usually always, they would gather the whole group, all the singers, each group, up around the front, all sing four or five songs together, all together. Now, that's when a lot of times they had some shouting, people would really get happy, get to crying, shaking hands all over the place, you know. It's good. It's really good.<sup>1</sup>

The larger semiannual conventions, which were discontinued in the mid-fifties, were also high points of the year for Whitescarver, although he was never president at these conventions. A silver cup was awarded to the best church choir at these conventions, and it was usually won either by Wiley's Chapel or by Stuart's Chapel. According to Whitescarver, the three major Logan County families that performed at these conventions were the McKinneys, the Stuarts, and the Campbells.

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<sup>1</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 550.

Whitescarver mentions that a major problem with the semiannual conventions was that they occasionally attracted "the wrong kind" of out-of-state quartets; ones that would drink, smoke, cut up, and act rudely.

Whitescarver did not begin teaching until the late sixties, and even today he jokingly says, "I still don't call myself a teacher. I could help one that didn't know anything. I always said, 'I just know enough about it to make me miserable.' But I do love it!"<sup>2</sup> Although he attended dozens of singing schools before the late sixties, he says he never thought he would become a teacher. He simply liked to sing and to improve his skills as a singer. The late J. C. Haliburton, who taught from the thirties into the seventies, was Whitescarver's most influential singing school teacher. Whitescarver attributes his preference for Stamps-Baxter songbooks to the fact that Haliburton always used them. Whitescarver believes, however, there is little difference between the books of Stamps-Baxter and those of Vaughan. Whitescarver and Haliburton sang together and remained friends through several decades.

Although he occasionally helped Haliburton with his schools, Whitescarver marks the beginning of his teaching career with a school he taught with Taylor Chapman. In the late sixties, Chapman was getting too old to sing, so he invited younger vocalists to lead the singing while he taught. Once, due to a last-minute change in plans, Whitescarver helped Chapman with a school, and, from that time to the present, churches have been calling on Whitescarver to teach singing schools. He estimates that he has taught in every rural church within a twenty-mile radius of Russellville. Much of the rural population knows him through

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<sup>2</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 188.



his work as an electrician and as a songleader. From Whitescarver's perspective, the ability to sing music is, to a large extent, a gift and he believes that most talented singers could teach singing schools if they wanted to.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, Whitescarver is proud that he has never made a commission from his booksales--he sells them at cost--and that he has never required a church to pay him his full \$200.00 fee if they were unable to pay. Since the early sixties, the Logan County Singing Convention has helped sponsor singing schools in the county churches that have hosted at least two conventions. Originally, the convention paid for half the cost of a school but as the fee for singing schools increased, they limited their donations to \$75.00 per school. All the singing schools Whitescarver has taught in the last several years have been partially financed by the Logan County Singing Convention.

Whitescarver says he would like to quit teaching because his voice is no longer strong, his eyes are no longer good, and his mind is no longer sharp, but he is apparently the only singing school teacher in Logan County today, and he is therefore pulled from retirement every year or two by a rural church determined to have a singing school.

Today, he continues to be active as a songleader at the United Pentecostal Church in Lewisburg. In the early seventies, he transferred his membership to this church because his son-in-law preached there and his daughter was the pianist. Whitescarver is in charge of songleading during the Sunday night and Wednesday night services. Another man leads the songs for the Sunday morning services. Whitescarver is proud of his daughter's musical abilities and he prefers to have her as an accompanist at his singing schools, but usually, he says, churches want to

use their own pianists so they will also benefit from the schools.

Reflecting on the present state of gospel music, Whitescarver says he likes the old styles of singing more than the current styles. He explains that many contemporary choirs and quartets use bass guitars and drums to accompany their singing which causes the messages or the words to be lost. On the other hand, he is devoted to the advancement of gospel music as a whole. Although he acknowledges that fewer people today are interested in gospel music compared to the interest of a few decades ago, he has seen signs in the last couple years that a growth of involvement in gospel music is occurring. He is surprised to read in the newspapers of local quartets he does not know, and he is aware of one quartet, the Redeemers, that tries to sing in the styles of the thirties and forties. Whitescarver especially enjoys seeing young people getting involved in singing gospel music. "I tell you," he says, "our young people, if you can get them interested in singing, well what is it nicer that you could have for them to be doing? And if you don't get them to that, they're going to be doing something!"<sup>3</sup>

For Whitescarver, teaching singing schools is one part of his work as an evangelistic singer. His decision to teach came after decades of involvement with quartets, conventions, and choirs. His work as a songleader throughout the county and in a variety of religious events also prepared him for teaching. The connection of gospel singing to religion as a whole is apparent in his evaluation of how gospel music will be received in the coming years:

I believe it will continue to grow now. I think the time we're living in, and the world condition, I think it's causing people to open their

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<sup>3</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 1, 677.



eyes and think more about the Lord, living for the Lord. Of course, <sup>4</sup> when they start that, they start with gospel song and gospel singing.

He has never made much money as a singing school teacher or as a singer, but making money has never been his major goal. Singing has always been an enjoyable sideline, a hobby. He believes much of the current decline in numbers of gospel music singers and teachers is due in part to the small financial rewards gained through the work, but for him it is God's work.

Clarence Eldridge DeWeese

Residence: Chalybeate  
Springs

Edmonson County,  
Kentucky

Age: 76, born 1909

Religion: United  
Baptist

Occupation: Gospel  
Music Teacher

In 1986, C. E. DeWeese will celebrate fifty years as a singing school teacher and gospel music composer. He is one of



Fig. 21. C. E. DeWeese, 1984.

the small number of singing school teachers who has been able to make a career of teaching gospel music. During his most active years in the fifties, he traveled throughout the South with his wife and lived in a travel trailer. In addition to teaching singing schools at churches,

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<sup>4</sup>Whitescarver, 10-18-83, Side 2, 302.

he has taught in normal schools, especially those sponsored by the James D. Vaughan Music Publisher, and has directed music programs at churches and seminaries. A central component of his most active years as a singing school teacher was his strong relationship with the James D. Vaughan Company, and he continues to submit songs to the company for publication. Although he is currently retired, he teaches singing schools and voice lessons around his home in Edmonson County.

DeWeese was born in 1909 near Litchfield, Grayson County, Kentucky but he lived in Warren and Edmonson counties for most of his childhood and early adult life. He recalls that when he was four or five years old, his father, who was a good singer, sponsored a singing school and had the teacher stay in their home. Not until later, however, did DeWeese develop an interest in singing. In 1932, when he was twenty-three years old, he was saved at a local revival and his interest in gospel music singing began. This conversion experience occurred after he had returned to Edmonson County from working five years in Louisville in a hardware business. While in Louisville, he met and married Nora Boggs.

Between 1932 and 1948, DeWeese balanced his work with his interest in gospel music. His business activities began in Smith's Grove, Kentucky, where for two years he worked in a couple grocery stores. Around 1932, he moved to Rhoda, Kentucky, where he bought a general store. Along with selling merchandise, he repaired watches. In 1938, he sold the business and moved to Knoxville for about a year where he pursued a musical career I will describe later. Between 1941 and 1943, when World War II was at its peak, DeWeese worked through a union as a carpenter and mechanic in Louisville. He decided to move back to Edmonson County,



however, because his mother needed his help. Between 1944 and 1948, he maintained a watch repair shop in Bowling Green, but his activities in gospel music were growing each year. Finally, in the late forties, he decided to sell the store and to work full-time as a singing school teacher and evangelistic singer.

DeWeese's gospel music activities began soon after he was saved in 1932. He sought out singing schools but could not find any, so he located a teacher willing to come into his community to teach one. The success of the school was modest and DeWeese ended up paying about half the teacher's fee from his own pocket. Not long after the school ended, however, Emmons Kinser asked DeWeese to join the quartet with which he sang. DeWeese expressed doubt about his own singing ability but Kinser assured him the other quartet members would help him. Every week, DeWeese recalls, he walked over several "hills and hollers" to a practice.

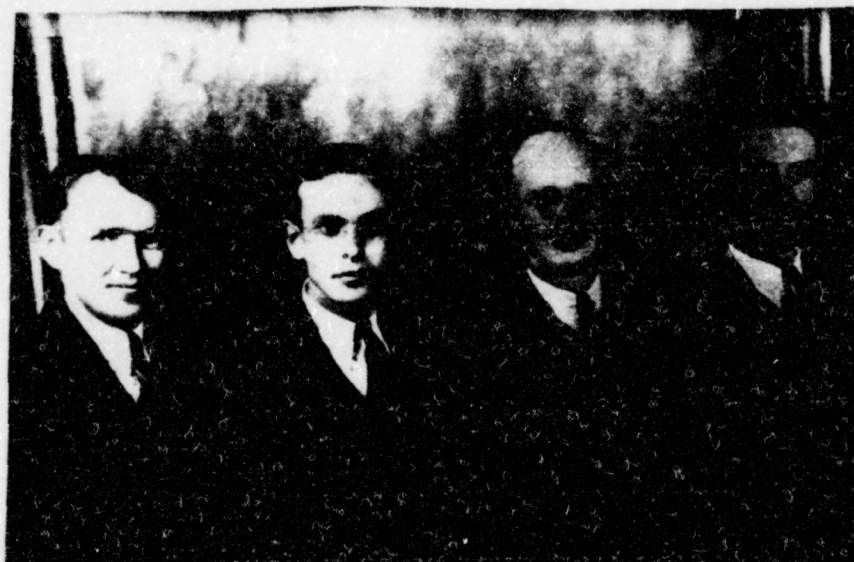


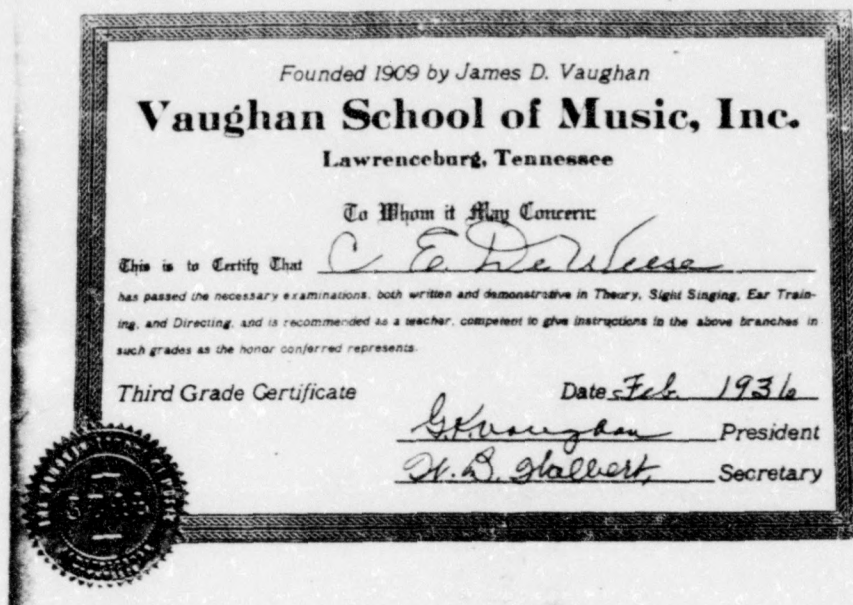
Fig. 22. The Kentucky Vaughan Quartet in the late thirties. DeWeese is second from the right.

DeWeese became increasingly interested in learning more about music, and Kinser told him about the Vaughan School of Music in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, which he had attended. In the fall of 1935, DeWeese wrote to the Vaughan Company and got a prompt reply inviting him to attend the six-week session beginning the first Monday in January, 1936. The whole quartet with which DeWeese sang, plus their pianist, decided to attend that session. While DeWeese lived at the Vaughan School, his wife and parents managed the store in Rhoda.

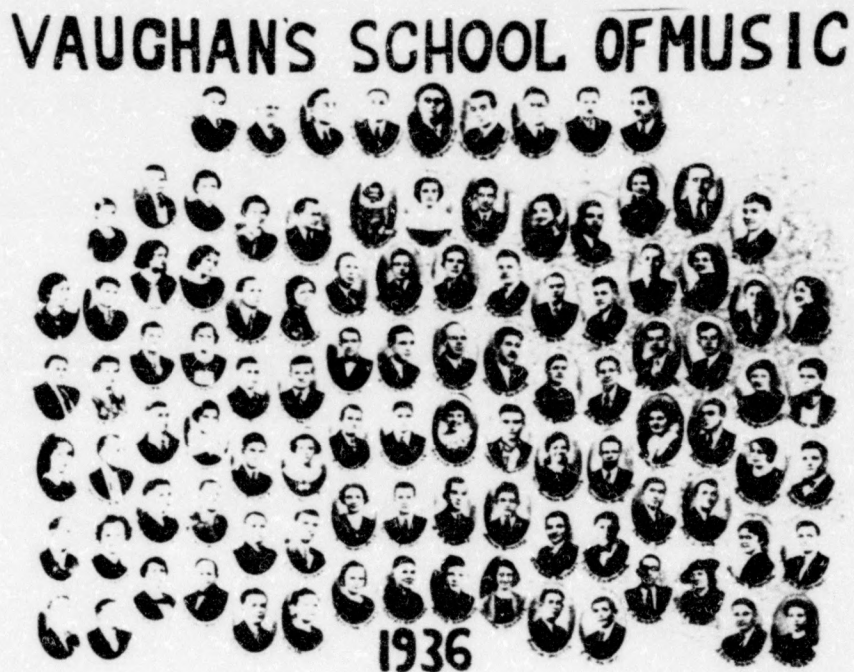
The Vaughan School had a profound influence on him, and for the next ten years he continued to attend Vaughan's normals, advancing to more difficult levels of study each time. Soon after completing his first session at the Vaughan School, which was called a normal school, he taught his first singing school and wrote his first gospel song, "Twill Be Heaven Below," which was published in a 1937 Vaughan songbook. He also began to help with songleading at churches and revivals in south-central Kentucky. The quartet with which he attended the 1936 normal became the Kentucky Vaughan Quartet, and the group sang at local religious events until they disbanded a couple years later. In 1938, DeWeese and another member of the quartet moved to Knoxville where they joined with two other singers to form the Vaughan Four. This group sang daily for WNOX in Knoxville for several months, but personal conflicts caused the group to disband after about a year.

Following several transitional years, DeWeese began in 1943 to resume his activities in gospel music with increasing intensity. He sang with the Sacred Five from that year until 1950, and he still has many fond memories of his association with the group for which he was the lead singer and manager. Originally, DeWeese was simply asked to





(a)



(b)

Fig. 23, (a) and (b). The diploma and graduation photograph DeWeese received following his attendance at the 1936 Vaughan School of Music.



Fig. 24. The Sacred Five. DeWeese sang with this group for about six years in the forties.

temporarily replace a member of the group who had quit, but, he jokingly recalls, they never found anyone. The group sang for WKCT in Bowling Green every day for several years. Their program was sponsored by the Standard Farm Store and the National Store which paid the radio station for the time, and paid the quartet a small wage. DeWeese explains the scheduling for the programs as follows:

We had a daily program for a number of years. . . 6:15 on weekdays and 9:00 on Sunday morning. Both times were real good because more rural people listened to gospel quartet singers as a general thing.



We had a good attendance there in Bowling Green, but we were reaching the farmer. They were eating breakfast maybe at 6:30. . . . Then on Sunday morning at 9:00, people that were going to Sunday School, they were getting ready. . . . It was just fifteen minutes. We'd get about four songs.<sup>5</sup>

The group also sang for WLBJ in Bowling Green during the early forties. They disbanded in 1950 when DeWeese decided to become a traveling singing school teacher, but they were given a rousing farewell by the radio station and their listeners. DeWeese recalls that the group received a basketful of letters from well-wishers during their final radio programs.

His decision to become a full-time teacher resulted from his gradually increasing activity in gospel music during the forties. For example, in addition to his work with the Sacred Five, he traveled in 1944 for several months with an evangelical party as a singer and song-leader. The evangelistic party organized revivals throughout the South



Fig. 25. Myers Evangelistic Party, 1944. DeWeese is second from the right.

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<sup>5</sup>DeWeese, 10-15-84, Side 2, 200.

and as far away as Michigan and Colorado. The work schedule was hectic. He recalls several times the group led a revival until late at night and then sang for a 7:00 AM live radio broadcast the next day. Between revivals, the evangelistic party quartet "concerted," or organized short singing programs in churches. He decided to leave the group because of illness in his family, but he continued to be involved in songleading, teaching, and singing around southcentral Kentucky throughout the forties. He also served as president for the monthly singing conventions in both Edmonson and Warren Counties.

In 1948, he "felt called" to close his watch repair shop in Bowling Green and to devote all his time to gospel music teaching. He traveled extensively in Kentucky and six other states teaching ten-day singing schools. These early years were not easy. The most difficult problems were connected with his overnight accommodations. In order to avoid offending members of church congregations, he occasionally spent every night during a singing school with a different family. These families generally fed him their "richest" food and kept him up late. He recalls one farm family that put him to bed at 2:00 AM and woke him up for breakfast at 4:30 AM. The strain of DeWeese's lifestyle was accentuated by his daytime work. He drove down to Nashville often as an apprentice to a piano tuning teacher, and in 1950 he began teaching private voice lessons. When his health began to decline, he and his wife realized they needed to reevaluate the career he had chosen.

In 1950 and 1951, two major changes occurred in the DeWeese's lives that eased some of the burdens from his career. In 1950, the Vaughan School of Music invited him to join the teaching faculty. Not only was he invited to teach at many of the winter and summer normals



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**MARCH 31st thru APRIL 18th**


C. E. DeWeese, of the Vaughan School of Music, Bowling Green, Ky., will be the Instructor for the School. Mr. DeWeese, who is well known throughout the Tri-State Area, has an outstanding reputation as an instructor in this field of music.

This School is Being Sponsored By The LEE COUNTY SINGING CONVENTION for the Purpose of Promoting Better Gospel Singing. For Further Information Contact Cecil Evans, Pennington Gap, Va., or Hascue Slagle, Pennington Gap, Va., R.F.D.

Fig. 26. A promotional poster for a Virginia singing school DeWeese led in 1958.

at Lawrenceburg, which had by then been reduced to three-week sessions, but he also taught at normals the company organized throughout the South. DeWeese recalls having taught for Vaughan normals in Memphis, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Kingsport, Tennessee; Columbia, Tennessee; Bowling Green, Kentucky; Brownsville, Kentucky; Greensburg, Tennessee; Tupelo, Mississippi; and other cities. The workday was



Fig. 27. A brochure describing a 1951 Vaughan Normal Music School in Brownsville, Kentucky, near DeWeese's home. DeWeese taught "Rudiments and Sight Singing" at the normal.

often long at normals. DeWeese recalls weeks in which he would teach or sing from 7:00 AM to 11:00 PM every day, teaching voice and classroom work. But the living arrangements were better, plus the organizing and financing of the normals were handled by the Vaughan Company. The prestige of working for the Vaughan normals helped DeWeese throughout his career, and his reputation as a good singing school teacher spread. He explains:



There wasn't so very many teachers that were devoting any time, and maybe teach once in a while, something like that, just in a community. But I was devoting full-time, and when they found that out, why I was having calls, some I couldn't even make.<sup>6</sup>

The other change occurred in 1951 when the DeWeeses purchased a travel trailer and Mrs. DeWeese began to travel with her husband. The couple had no children to keep them stationary, and the advantages of having a travel trailer were numerous. Mrs. DeWeese could cook good meals for her husband and the constancy of the living environment in a trailer made traveling less strenuous. Also, the couple was more able to find times to relax in privacy. Between 1951 and 1958, the DeWeeses traveled year-round except for the week between Christmas and New Years Day. Once DeWeese actually ended a singing school on Christmas Eve. He estimates the majority of the churches in which he taught heard of him through word of mouth, but he acknowledges that the columns he wrote for the Vaughan's Family Visitor also helped attract teaching positions. During these years, DeWeese kept his headquarters and his mailing address in Bowling Green, but he liked to call Lawrenceburg his second home.

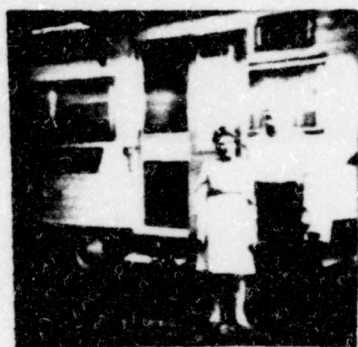
DeWeese was always self-employed and he pursued a variety of gospel music activities. He was never part of the Vaughan Company's salaried staff, but was simply hired by them for individual normal schools. When not teaching at a Vaughan normal, he was teaching singing schools or organizing normals on his own. When asked to organize a normal for a community, he invited gospel music teachers he knew to help him for three weeks. He tried to avoid taking part in normals where the teachers were not acquainted with each other because past experience had shown him that opinions often clashed between music

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<sup>6</sup>DeWeese, 10-8-84, Side 1, 337.

teachers, especially if classically-trained teachers were present. The normals had advantages over singing schools in that with normals a community was more assured of quality, thorough coursework with examinations, and an official closing ceremony in which certificates were awarded.

By the late fifties, the DeWeeses had worn out several travel trailers. He recalls that he taught singing schools in most Southern states plus Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. The major denominations that hired him were the Methodists, the Cumberland Presbyterians, and, most of all, the Baptists. DeWeese believes that, although some churches such as those of the Primitive Baptist Church opposed harmony singing from songbooks with music, the vast majority of rural churches like to sing in harmony.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 28, (a) and (b). Two trailers used by the DeWeeses in the fifties.



In 1958, DeWeese began to feel fatigued and his doctor suggested he spend a month or two in the Florida sunshine. While in Florida, he met faculty members from the Florida Baptist Institute in Lakeland. That year in October, after he had returned to Bowling Green, he received a letter from the president of the Institute inviting him to come down to teach music there. Within a couple of months, the DeWeeses had moved to Lakeland, and his association with the Institute lasted until his retirement ten and a half years later at the age of sixty-two.

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JUNE 10, 1964

LAKELAND, FLORIDA

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Pictured above are Professor C. E. DeWeese and the A-Capella Choir at the close of the Florida Baptist Institute and Seminary in Lakeland, Florida, May 8th.

Professor DeWeese has been with the Seminary for five years and is a credit to the field of Christian Music.

Fig. 29. The Florida Baptist Institute choir in 1964. DeWeese was the choir director.

He was also minister of music at the First Missionary Baptist Church in Auburndale for about six years in the sixties. During his free hours, he taught singing schools and voice lessons, plus he helped organize

singing conventions and tuned pianos. The DeWeeses did not cut their ties with Kentucky, however, and every summer they spent their two-week vacation in Edmonson County. Although DeWeese occasionally taught in Vaughan's normals during the sixties, his relationship with the company weakened in the mid-sixties when the company was bought out.

DeWeese retired in 1971, and for the following eight years, Nora and he spent half of each year in Kentucky and the other half in Florida. In 1980, the couple moved back to Kentucky to stay. They live today in the small town of Chalybeate Springs in Edmonson County.

He has not retired, however, from singing and teaching gospel music in the area. In addition to teaching a few singing schools each year, he helps lead songs at local singings and church events. He also sings lead with a quartet, the Sacred Singers, that perform every other week at the Cardinal Healthcare Center in Bowling Green. The concerts generally last about an hour, and the singers encourage the patients to sing along on gospel songs they know.

During the past two summers, DeWeese has worked with one of the few remaining gospel music schools in the South, the Cumberland Valley School of Gospel Music in Lebanon, Tennessee. At the end of June, the Cumberland College has invited DeWeese and about a dozen other music teachers to instruct students on a variety of gospel music skills. In 1984, 242 students from five states enrolled in the two-week school. The connection of this institute to the singing school tradition is made apparent by the section on the application form that asks the applicant to indicate how many singing schools he or she has attended.

DeWeese also continues to write gospel songs. Songs written by DeWeese are scattered throughout Vaughan songbooks from 1937 to the



No. 54. **THAT IS WHY I LOVE HIM SO.**  
 AUGER M. PACE C. E. DEWEESE

1. Each day I am sing-ing, joy-bells are ring-ing, Happy as I can be,  
 2. I'm go-ing to glo-ry, tell-ing the sto-ry, Mak-ing His prai-ses ring,  
 3. When he here is end-ed and I're as-cend-ed You-der to heav'n a-bove;

No long-er I'm doubt-ing, dis-ly I'm shout-ing, Je-sus has made me free,  
 While on-ward I'm go-ing, oth-ers I'm show-ing Je-sus my Lord and King,  
 I know he will meet me, glad-ly He'll greet me, Je-sus the one I love.

CHORUS  
 Oh, praise the Lord, I'm hap-py all the day,  
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, I'm hap-py all the day,

I'll trust His word, and glad-ly I'll o-bey;  
 Trust His word, trust His word, glad-ly I'll o-bey;

Shout and shine, shout and shine, and tell where-er I go,  
 I'll shout and shine, and tell where-er I go,

Copyright, 1940, C. E. DeWeese and Thomas D. Vaughan, authors.

**THAT IS WHY I LOVE HIM SO. Concluded.**

That He is mine, That is why I love Him so.  
 He is mine, He is mine,

No. 55. **LET US GO AND WORK TODAY.**  
 AUGER M. PACE J. T. MULLIGAN

1. In the light of love shin-ing from a-shore, Let us glad-ly walk  
 2. In the Mas-ter's name to the best pre-claim His name to save  
 3. With His flag un-furled tell it to the world How He died and went

ev-ry pass-ing day; Go-ing hand in hand at the Lord's com-mand,  
 and re-deem from sin; Bring-ing hope and cheer to the sad and drear,  
 back to heav'n a-bove; He pre-pares a place for the saved by grace,

D.S.—Do-ing all we can, help-ing fall-en man  
 FINE CHORUS

Help-ing oth-ers to find the way, bright way, Let us go  
 Let us go with a will to win, to win, Let us go  
 In that home, blessed home of love, of love, Let us go

On and up to the land of day, bright day, D.S.

and work to-day, In the bright and shin-ing way,  
 work to-day, In the bright shin-ing way;

Copyright, 1940, Mulligan and Pace, authors.

Fig. 30. One of DeWeese's compositions, "That Is Why I Love Him So," which appeared in Vaughan's 1940 Crowning Harmony.

current year. He has occasionally contributed songs to other publications. For example, the Leoma Music Company, a new songbook publisher in Leoma, Tennessee, has agreed to publish one of his songs within the year. DeWeese explains that songbook publishers such as Vaughan and Stamps-Baxter do not generally pay gospel songwriters whose songs they publish, but rather they give them free songbooks. He recalls he has generally received about fifty songbooks for every one of his songs Vaughan published.

He distinguishes gospel songs from other kinds of songs, and he insists that what many people call gospel songs are actually sentimental

songs with no scriptural message. Hymns differ from gospel songs, says DeWeese, in that the former are songs of praise such as "How Great Thou Art," while the latter are songs with a gospel message based on scripture. He believes that no secular songs should be sung in church singing schools, and even in singing schools or normals held in school buildings DeWeese uses only sacred songs in his classes.

Reflecting on his years as a singing school teacher, DeWeese draws several conclusions concerning the development of gospel music traditions in the South. Concerning churches, he believes congregations tend to remain loyal to a songbook publisher; a tendency which is important to publishers because church songbooks are generally worn out after a couple years of use and need to be reordered. The job of finding churches in need of songbooks and introducing them to the songbooks of a certain publisher was, according to DeWeese, a part of a singing school teacher's work, especially if the teacher maintained a close relationship with a publisher. DeWeese has found that gospel music traditions have been most widespread and tenacious in churches in the more southern states of Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia. His impression, however, is that even in those states the traditions exist only in certain sections or pockets. Through his work, he has tried to encourage congregations to sing more and to meet weekly for choir practices.

DeWeese believes gospel music has suffered several setbacks in the past couple of decades; the most severe ones being connected with the nature of some professional gospel quartets. Although the emotional part of singing and worshiping is important to DeWeese, he firmly believes that many gospel quartets encourage "cheering and handclapping



and squeeling and whistling," which, he believes, should have no part in gospel music performances. "There's not much sacredness to it," DeWeese says, "and the biggest part of the groups now, they go in for that kind of program, I'm sorry to say."<sup>7</sup> Speaking of the broader development of gospel quartet singing, DeWeese says:

The quartets to begin with were singing for the good they could do. . . . The old original Vaughan Quartet, they traveled all over the United States and into Canada. They would go to sing for revival meetings, camp meetings, and so forth, and they were strictly spiritual. They were really good. But as time went on, there was singers that come into the quartet business that was just there because they liked to sing, and they liked to travel, and just for a good time. And they got to doing things that wasn't becoming to Christians. In other words, I've seen, I've personally seen quartets go for personal appearances when they'd by drinking. . . . I've known of quartets being put in jail for being drunk.<sup>8</sup>

He believes further that gospel messages are often drowned out by too much instrumentation, making the songs useless. "If it isn't for the message that you're going to deliver," says DeWeese, "why not just whistle it?"<sup>9</sup>

DeWeese currently teaches private lessons at his home and enjoys singing gospel music with local singers. The health of DeWeese and his wife is such that their activities are limited, but his desire to teach has not declined. Teaching is what he does best. Among the highlights of his teaching career, he recalls the National Singing Convention in 1955 where Adger M. Pace and Frank Stamps selected his song, "God's Infinite Love," as the song of the year. But he recalls with most affection a time he led a large singing in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee:

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<sup>7</sup>DeWeese, 10-15-84, Side 1, 539.

<sup>8</sup>DeWeese, 10-8-84, Side 2, 400.

<sup>9</sup>DeWeese, 10-15-84, Side 1, 569.

I led in one singing they had down there. They had so many singers, they went up to the fairground in elevated seats, and they estimated the congregation, the singers, as 20,000. And different ones would lead the congregational singing. And now that was really singing! They were trained singers. . . [from] North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama. . . and Mississippi, and different states would be represented.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of this event in his life suggests DeWeese has had a strong love for hearing congregational singing. More generally, he has demonstrated in all his gospel music activities a desire to use singing as a means to evoke emotions, not spectacular dancing-and-clapping emotions, but subtle emotions which he has hoped would bring people to accept the concepts of fundamentalist conversion-centered religion.

Edwin Dye

Residence: Bowling  
Green

Warren County,  
Kentucky

Age: 60, born 1924

Religion: General  
Baptist Church

Occupation: Barber

Edwin Dye  
is a Bowling Green  
barber who has  
taught singing  
schools on a part-  
time basis since  
the early fifties.



Fig. 31. Edwin Dye, 1984.

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<sup>10</sup>DeWeese, 10-8-84, Side 2, 239.



From his childhood, he has been surrounded by gospel music. His father was a singing school teacher and songleader, and the church he attended then, the Cool Springs General Baptist Church, was one of the most musical churches in Butler County, where he was raised. Dye differs from many singing school teachers in that he has, throughout his life, maintained an active interest in nongospel music traditions such as Dixieland Jazz and Western Swing. He emphasizes, however, that singing bass for gospel quartets is his favorite musical activity.

Dye was born in 1924 in Breckinridge County, Kentucky, but when he was three years old his family moved down to Butler County in south-central Kentucky. His father, Hershel, was a farmer and grocery store owner who taught singing schools around Butler County as a sideline. "There'd be one somewhere in the community every year," says Dye, "We had a lot of them at our church."<sup>11</sup> The first singing school Dye attended was held in a community school house when he was seven years old and was taught by Elic Embry.

Until he was twenty years old, Dye farmed in Butler County. For the next five years he worked mainly as a construction worker, a mechanic, and a Navy man. In 1947, when he was twenty-three, he married Myrl Reid who came from a family of gospel music singers. In fact, her father, Rosco Reid, was also a part-time singing school teacher.

In 1949, Dye attended a barber college in Louisville, Kentucky, and then began his career as a barber in Bowling Green. Seven years later, in 1957, he built the barbershop he continues to use as his workplace today. The barbershop has three barber chairs, and for most of

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<sup>11</sup>Dye, 12-11-84, Side 1, 118.

the years since he opened the shop, he has worked with Wavie Skaggs and David Dye.

Edwin Dye did not begin teaching singing schools until the early fifties, but he was involved in gospel music activities when he was a young child. In addition to his home church, several other Butler County churches emphasized music in their services and sponsored singing schools and conventions. These churches worked together to schedule singing events so no overlap would occur. Dye sets the heyday of gospel music activities in southcentral Kentucky in the thirties, during his schooldays.

World War II was a turning point in the development of gospel music, according to Dye. In many southcentral Kentucky counties, singing schools and conventions virtually stopped occurring during the war. Many of the young men had gone to fight and the rationing of gas and tires caused people to travel less. Dye believes that when the young men returned from the war, many of them chose to work in factories instead of farms. "Back before World War II," explains Dye, "most everybody was farmers and worked little jobs around town. There wasn't any factories much, not in this area. . . and they didn't really have anything else to do."<sup>12</sup> Dye also emphasizes that an increase in entertainment options during the forties affected gospel music activities. People had the money and liesure to seek out different forms of entertainment. Also, electricity was becoming increasingly accessible to rural areas, and television was growing in popularity.

Dye insists that when he started teaching in the early fifties interest in singing schools was declining and that a decline in the

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<sup>12</sup>Dye, 12-11-84. Side 1, 360.



quality of rural church singing was the result. In fact, he suggests that "good singing means good churches" and that interest in churches in general declined after World War II.<sup>13</sup>

The popularity of singing conventions did not decline after the war, but their format changed. Dye recalls that conventions used to emphasize congregational singing, choirs, and classes rather than quartets. Representatives from songbook publishing companies such as Vaughan and Stamps-Baxter used to attend all the semiannual county conventions and would distribute samples of their most recent songbooks to everyone in attendance with hopes that the singers would purchase the books. Then these representatives and other songleaders would take turns leading the gathering in a couple songs. In the forties, the singing conventions began to center more on performances by quartets. Dye says, "It seems like all the conventions started to, they'd have at least one or two guest quartets there, and that kindly took the place of a lot of the classes."<sup>14</sup> Dye believes quartets did not "take hold" in most southcentral Kentucky counties until the fifties. Before then, he says, only a few quartets existed in each county, and most quartets that sang at conventions were from out of state.

Dye has enjoyed attending and performing at conventions throughout his life. He points out that Warren County, in which Bowling Green is located, never had the large semiannual conventions popular in the surrounding rural counties. "They had them [Warren County Singing Conventions] up through maybe the sixties," says Dye, "but people didn't

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<sup>13</sup>Dye, 9-20-84, unrecorded interview.

<sup>14</sup>Dye, 12-11-84, Side 1, 241.

attend like they do in surrounding counties, wasn't interested in it. . . . There's so many places to go, good highways."<sup>15</sup> Warren County did support a monthly convention for a couple decades, however, and occasionally large singings were held in Richardsville. Dye believes the semiannual conventions in Allen County attracted the largest crowds compared to the other southcentral Kentucky county conventions, and he attended the Allen County conventions more than any of the others. The semiannual conventions in that county were generally held in a large tabernacle in Scottsville. In addition to this convention, a monthly convention was held, and continues to be held, in local Allen County churches. Along with his work for the county conventions, Dye has helped with the yearly Kentucky State Singing Convention, of which he was president in 1977.

Dye has sung bass with amateur quartets since his early twenties. He explains that the financial benefits of singing with amateur quartets are small but that the enjoyment is great. "For local groups," explains Dye, "they take up a freewill offering, help pay the expense. It's a lot of expense. . . . You're singing for the enjoyment more than anything else because if you break even you're doing well."<sup>16</sup> The following list outlines the major quartets with which Dye has sung.

1. The Reid Quartet, The Dye and Cole Quartet. From the late forties through the mid-fifties, members of Dye's family and of his wife's family formed this quartet. Although they lived in different parts of Butler and Ohio counties, the members got together to sing at

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<sup>15</sup>Dye, 12-11-84, Side 2, 060.

<sup>16</sup>Dye, 12-11-84, Side 1, 342.



local churches and for guest spots on radio programs. For a short period in the early fifties, he also sang with a family quartet called the Dye and Cole Quartet.

2. The Louisville Quartet. In 1949, while at the barber college in Louisville, Dye sang with this quartet which, like the Reid Quartet, sang at church events in the Louisville area.
3. The Forest Park Quartet, The Dixie Airs. Based in Bowling Green, this quartet which Dye joined in 1958 was popular enough to have its own radio program every Sunday morning on WKCT. Around 1960, the group changed its name to the Dixie Airs. Dye sang with this group until 1966.
4. The Gospel Five, The Southern Melody Quartet. Dye was invited to join this group, based in Franklin, Simpson County, Kentucky, in 1966. The group had a short radio program in Franklin and produced a record album. In 1969, the group became the Southern Melody Quartet which stayed together until 1972.
5. The Kentucky Harmonizers. Dye sang with this group from 1972 to 1982, during which time the members produced three albums. The group was based in Lewisburg, Logan County, Kentucky. Of special interest, Chester Whitescarver sang with this group during the late forties and early fifties.
6. The Holder Quartet. Since 1982, Dye has been singing with this quartet, which is based in Westmoreland, Tennessee. The core of the group, the Holder family, has been singing together for over twenty-seven years and has produced several albums.

Although Dye has always liked to sing with quartets, he has never quit barbering to sing full-time and has seldom traveled beyond southcentral

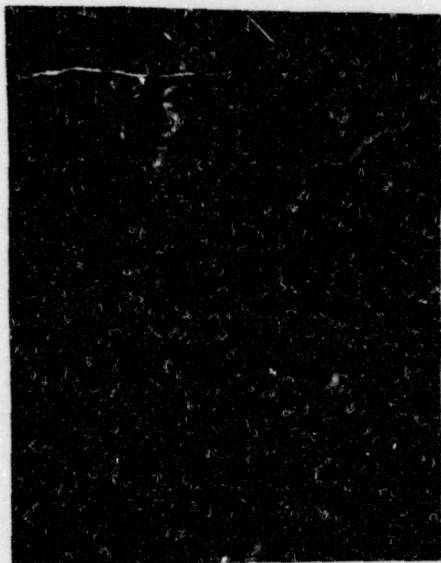
Copies

May Not  
Film

Well!



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Fig. 32, (a) through (d).  
 (a) Dye and Coles Quartet,  
 ca. 1950; (b) Dixie Airs,  
 ca. 1964; (c) Louisville  
 Quartet, ca. 1949; (d) The  
 Holders, ca. 1982.

Kentucky to perform.

Quartets today tend to learn songs from albums and by ear, says Dye, rather than from books. He does not believe the tendency is all bad, however, as he explains in the following narrative:

Most of your professional groups, they don't sing it like it's on music. . . . They have good arrangements. It's the best, I think. . . . Most of our music [with the Holder Quartet], they'll hear it somewhere and she'll [Sue Holder] write the words down and hand me a card with no music at all, and I just have to feel my way. Maybe I've never even heard the song. . . . She's got a real good ear and she can pick that [melody] real good. . . . If I had a bass lead, and, of course, I wouldn't know anything about it if I'd never heard the song, she might pick that lead out for me on piano. . . . They buy a lot of records and they do the same thing you're doing, tape a lot of, they go to these singings and they tape the songs. Then she can play the tape and get the words off the tape. . . . It's kind of cheating a man who can read music. You don't get to practice the music. You're just singing it by ear if you don't have music in front of you. . . . However, I don't think a fellow should have to depend on that music all the time. If he does, why he's hurting if has to just keep his eye on the music. . . . I always like to have the music to start with so I'll know I'm getting my part right.<sup>17</sup>

During another interview, Dye concludes that singing from books is best because when a singer learn a song from records he can only sing it one way, and that way will lack a personal touch.<sup>18</sup> On the whole, however, Dye is able to see the advantages in a variety of methods for learning to sing gospel music, even ones that depart from the singing school tradition.

Dye states that "singing schools are just about zero now" but he continues to teach one or two per year.<sup>19</sup> His style of teaching is to concentrate on drilling the students on scales and timing. He acknowledges that he has never put a large amount of time into teaching, but

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<sup>17</sup>Dye, 2-1-85, Side 1, 105.

<sup>18</sup>Dye, 9-20-84, unrecorded interview.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



he believes that some full-time singing school teachers who work closely with songbook publishers often lack certain teaching skills, as he describes in the following passages:

They were pushing their books more than anything else, seemed to me. . . and they'd leave, and they'd taught you about ten songs that you could sing and sing well. . . but then the music, you hadn't learned much about this music because you've spent ten nights learning new songs. . . . The idea of a school, I think, is teaching the music and then let him learn his own songs.

In fact, a lot of them wouldn't teach you as much because they knew so much about it, most of them that I went to, some of the bigger schools like that. They knew it all, see? And they thought you ought to catch it just like that, but it's not that easy.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, Dye often expresses admiration and respect for the skills of many full-time teachers such as Jim McKinney.

Dye believes that several songbook publishers have produced good quality books, and in his singing schools he has used the Songs of Inspiration books, published until recently by the Benson Publishing Company, the Mull Singing Convention songbooks published by the Tennessee Music Company, and the Stamps-Baxter convention books. When he taught a singing school at the Chandler Chapel in Logan County last summer, he simply sang from the Songs of Inspiration songbooks the church used for its regular services. When he has time to order "rudiments" books, he orders them from the Vaughan Company, but he likes the Stamps-Baxter songbooks best.

Dye has occasionally led singings at churches in which he says six or eight songs often begin each service, but his bass voice makes leading the high lead part difficult. When teaching singing schools, rather than using a piano or tuning fork to pitch songs, he simply

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<sup>20</sup>Dye, 12-11-84, Side 1, 377, 148.

itches them by ear to where the lead part is set within his voice range.

Dye is different from many singing school teachers in that he is interested in a variety of music styles. He describes himself as a lover of any kind of music. His favorite music is gospel, followed by Dixieland Jazz, Western, Blues, Country, and finally Bluegrass. He does not rank Bluegrass high because the chording is so simple for guitar, which he plays. The closed jazz chords of Western Swing are more attractive to him. Occasionally on Friday or Saturday nights at Granny's Restaurant in Richardsville, he will play Country-Western music with some of his friends. Also, a group with which he plays called the Westerners plays at health centers, shopping malls, and dinners at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green. With this group, Dye usually plays tenor banjo, mandolin, or guitar.

Dye's prediction for gospel music in the future is not bright. Ironically, he believes interest is fading because so much of the music is being performed today:

Right through this area, I would say it might be going down a little bit because they're getting so many quartets and so many places having a singing every month, it's kindly wore the people out. They kind of got bored of it. When you have too much of anything, you know, and that's the way it's been. . . . Here in this county alone I can think of three churches that have a singing once a month. Now, that's three singings a month, see, right there. And people kind of get bored of too much of it. . . . In other words, with that many churches having singings, they're going to have to use the same groups pretty often to have a singing, and you go to hear a group, I don't care whether it's a professional group. . . you don't want to hear them every month.<sup>21</sup>

He also believes the quality of the music is not what it was in the forties and fifties. Like the other singing school teachers I interviewed, Dye strongly favors gospel songs that maintain close four-part harmonies and

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<sup>21</sup>Dye, 12-11-84, Side 1, 321.



strong melodies:

They've got some good words for songs now, and always have had, but they've just about run out of melody. It's very little tune there, very little tune, and most of it, instead of sitting down there and giving you some good four-part harmony, there'd be one of them sing a stanza maybe by himself, solo, whereas your other three men standing right there with their arms folded, patting their hands or something. But as far as a good quartet singing, I like four-part harmony. . . just really settling down to a good four-part harmony, whether it be spirituals or good slow hymns or what have you. . . I don't mind hearing a bass get a lead, and the first tenor get a lead, maybe second tenor get a little lead, but as far as just doing a whole stanza by theirselves and then maybe the rest of them join then on maybe one score of the chorus or something like that, I don't really care for that. . . . Seems like younger people likes that, but to me it just don't have the good close harmony that they used to have. . . . They've just changed the pattern.<sup>22</sup>

Dye is currently more involved in performing gospel music than are the other two singing school teachers I interviewed but he also expresses more pessimism about the future of gospel music. His health is good, and he is not retired, so perhaps he is more able to feel an interest in the future of gospel music than are the other teachers. He expresses no desire to stop teaching singing schools or to stop singing. Dye is in a good position to evaluate the past and future of gospel music and singing schools.

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<sup>22</sup>Dye, 2-1-85, Side 1, 143.

## CONCLUSION

Singing school teachers in southcentral Kentucky have clearly been victimized by a shift in gospel music styles and learning methods. Although the teaching careers of the three men profiled in the last chapter were varied and affected by different factors, certain key changes in gospel music traditions as a whole affected all of them similarly. In part one of this conclusion, I will use the interdependence pattern illustration presented in the introduction to show generally how the interdependence triangle of publisher, teacher, and singing event has shifted, causing an alienation of the singing school teachers. In part two, issues concerning gospel music scholarship and research methods will be touched on. Specifically, the place of rural gospel music scholarship in the study of Southern music and culture will be evaluated.

### A Shift in Interdependence

World War II marks a major turning point in the development of gospel music traditions in southcentral Kentucky. A local congregational singing tradition which had been growing steadily, sometimes rapidly, for over a century began its decline. Perhaps the war itself contributed to the decline. Communities were fragmented and supplies were rationed, causing most conventions to be temporarily cancelled; momentum was lost. More important, however, the war simply occurred during a time when rural people were beginning to have electricity, radios,



televisions, good roads, factory jobs, and more entertainment options. It was a time of great change in the region, and the change affected the gospel music.

Within the traditions of gospel music, a movement was growing during that period to form quartets, a movement that has continued its growth to the present day. The community singings, the large singing conventions, and the singing schools were largely replaced by quartet concerts. The nature of this change can be illustrated by an analysis of gospel music interdependence patterns during three different time periods.

In 1835, a triangle of interdependence existed in the popular religious singing movement in which the camp meeting was the strongest element. Interest in singing religious music increased dramatically during this period. Music publishers and singing school teachers found a public anxious to learn new religious songs. Congregational singing at religious gatherings such as camp meetings was clearly the norm for religious music performance.

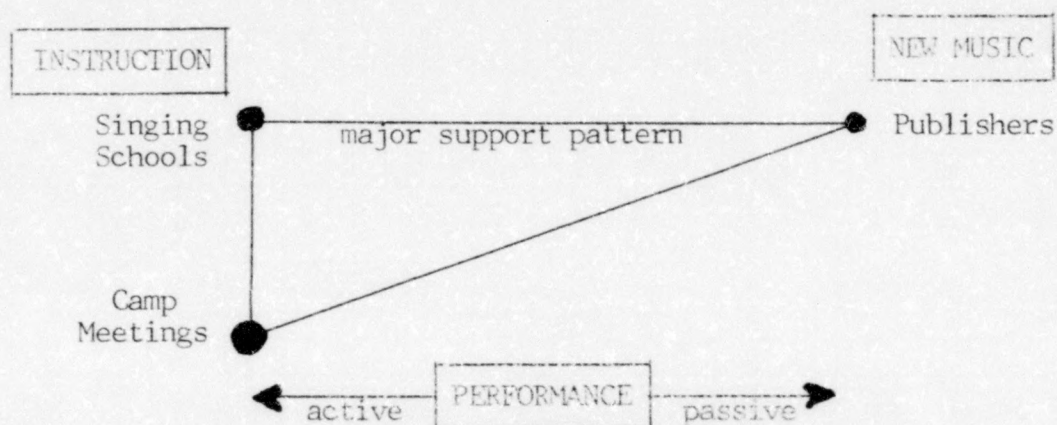


Fig. 33. Interdependence Triangle, 1835

A hundred years later in 1935, singing conventions were the major performance arenas for gospel music. At these gatherings, both congregational singing and concert performances took place. The spectrum of performance arenas had become broader, however, and evangelical meetings, revivals, concerts, and homecomings also featured the performance of gospel music. Interest among the public for gospel music was at its height. Songbook publishers, normal music schools, singing schools, and quartets were all enjoying success. A stable and flourishing interdependence and mutual support system existed between virtually all the major gospel music institutions and traditions.

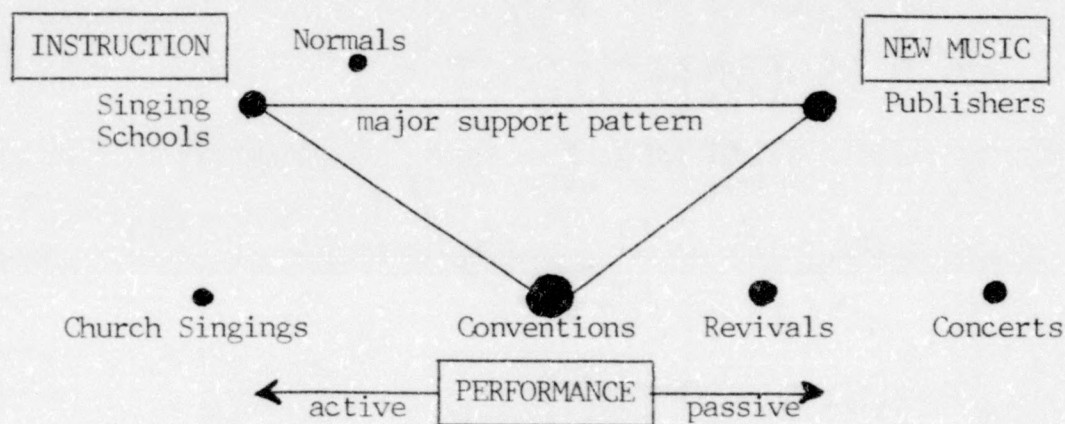


Fig. 34. Interdependence Triangle, 1935

By 1955, the pattern had completely changed. The long-standing triangle of support was weakened as the professional quartets and record companies began to be more powerful. A growing number of gospel music enthusiasts were choosing to listen rather than to sing, or they were content to learn songs from records. Songbook publishers were



experiencing a decline in orders, and many of them had gone out of business by the mid-sixties.

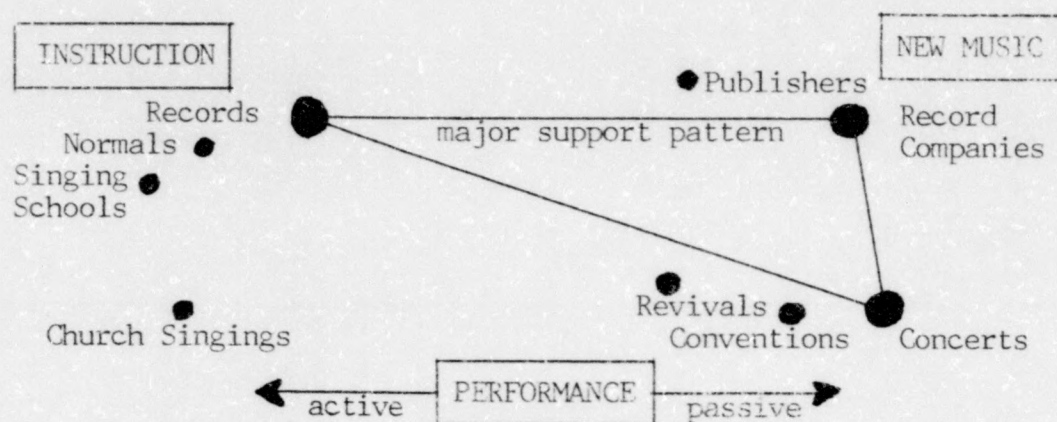


Fig. 35. Interdependence Triangle, 1955

Today, the record company/quartet connection is still quite strong. For many gospel singers, record collections have come to represent performances, sources for new material, and teachers (the singers can mimic the groups on records), all rolled into one. What was once a triangle of institutions has become, for them, a stack of recordings; they have little use for publishers and singing school teachers. Although these singers might be dynamic performers, they will generally not be skilled at singing new or difficult songs with a congregation or choir. Some singers, however, still prefer learning songs from songbooks and are anxious to support publishers and singing school teachers--the old interdependence triangle is not dead--but the strongest contingent of gospel music enthusiasts is attracted to a modern gospel song style that features solo singing rather than the

four-part harmony styles most popular only a few years ago.

All my informants agreed that the quality of congregational singing has declined since the forties. The reasons for the decline are in some ways clear and in other ways elusive. Certainly, the record companies and professional quartets attracted the attention of gospel music enthusiasts away from community singings, but why did an interest in congregational singing not continue to be high? Why did the quartet concerts and the community singings not thrive side by side?

Several factors are probably involved. Perhaps people experienced feelings of self-consciousness, inferiority, or intimidation concerning their musical abilities after hearing more and more polished and trained quartets perform. Or perhaps at a very fundamental level they simply preferred to listen rather than to sing. All the teachers I interviewed argued, however, that people loved to sing but that a number of external pressures and changes caused the attendance at community singings to decline.

For example, C. E. DeWeese argues that quartets simply took over the singing conventions. He describes other areas in the South where convention organizers have prevented quartets from inundating the singings and from taking time away from congregational singing. At these conventions, DeWeese says, a good mix of congregational singing and quartet singing has continued to exist. In southcentral Kentucky, gospel singing enthusiasts were, perhaps, either too polite, too apathetic, or simply too helpless to keep the growing number of quartets from edging out congregational singing from the conventions. DeWeese suggests that quartet members were often elected as presidents



of the conventions and that they used their power to shift the emphasis from congregational to quartet singing. At a national level, several songbook publishing companies were bought out by successful quartets who halted distribution of convention books.

Singing school teachers suffered from the decline of congregational singing. The teachers were always more involved in helping congregations and choirs improve their singing abilities than in training quartets. Quartet members could learn from other quartet members and from records; they often possessed above-average natural musical abilities and could make do without musical training. Some professional quartets saw the singing schools, publishers, and community singings as threatening to their careers and probably hastened the decline of all these institutions.

Despite this decline, the future of the new-song congregational singings in southcentral Kentucky, and by extension the singing schools and publishers, is not engraved in stone. With some imagination, one could envision ways a revitalization of community singings could begin. A few rural churches in a county might take the initiative to reorganize a community singing, and interest might be rekindled. From another angle, denominational authorities, arts councils, chambers of commerce, private businesses, or other granting agencies might take an interest in supporting regular community singings and singing schools. By offering such support, these agencies could not only invigorate a Southern musical tradition, but could also bring back a community event that rural people might like to see again.

Some evidence suggests that the decline in attendance at community singings and singing schools was not caused by a lack of public

interest per se. For example, Chester Whitescarver has found that interest among many congregations for learning to read from songbooks is high, but that the cost of financing a school and the difficulty of finding a good teacher cause few schools to be organized. A public that loved to sing gospel music was, perhaps, victimized by circumstances beyond their control. A substantial number of rural people in south-central Kentucky, especially those over fifty years old who can remember larger community singings, might be eager to support a revival of singings and singing schools, but currently no clear avenue for revitalization exists.

#### Issues and Comments

In the course of conducting research for this thesis, I have become aware of a variety of arguments and opinions concerning the place of gospel music traditions in folklore scholarship. These music traditions are difficult to categorize and are easily subjected to questions such as "Is that music really folk music?" and "If it is not, why should folklorists be interested in studying the institutions that have developed around it?" The issue is complex and requires more attention than what I can present in these closing pages, but a few controversies deserve comment. Specifically, certain factions of folk music scholars have suggested twentieth century gospel music has had a weakening, if not destructive, influence on Southern traditional music and culture. These critics have most often been either ballad and folksong scholars or enthusiasts of old-book shape-note conventions such as those connected with The Sacred Harp, and they continue to have a strong if subtle influence on the manner by which folklorists



approach gospel music.

Ballad and folksong scholars began scouring the Appalachian Mountains (east of southcentral Kentucky) for British ballads in the 1910s, about the same time gospel music was experiencing an enormous spread in popularity. Cecil Sharp, the most renowned of these early collectors, wrote of his singers: "Very often they misunderstood our requirements and would give us hymns."<sup>1</sup> His fieldwork companion, Maud Karpeles, describes the "hymns" with a more negative tone: "During the forty-six weeks we spent in the mountains we never heard a bad tune, except for the occasional hymn that had strayed from one of the missionary settlements."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most extreme anti-gospel music sentiment was expressed by Emma Bell Miles in her 1905 The Spirit of the Mountains where she groups gospel songs with the tourist trade and the synthetic dyes as being among the items that were destroying Southern culture and pride:

The old music is supplanted by cheap Sunday-school song-books that contain shaped notes and directions so clear that the wayfaring man who has learned to sing on the do-re-mi-fa-sol basis, though he knows not one key from another, need not err therein.<sup>3</sup>

For ballad collectors, the rise in popularity of gospel music was clearly a negative cultural development. Not only did collecting become more difficult, but the broader mission of many collectors to

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<sup>1</sup>Cecil J. Sharp, English Folk-Songs from the Southern Appalachians, ed. Maud Karpeles, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 2:xxvi.

<sup>2</sup>Cecil J. Sharp and Maud Karpeles, Eighty English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Emma Bell Miles, The Spirit of the Mountains (New York: J. Pott, 1905; reprint ed., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), p. 193.

restore an earlier ballad-singing culture to the mountain people was also being undermined. By ignoring this dynamic gospel tradition, however, collectors missed the opportunity to document the growth of an indigenous singing tradition that apparently captured the imagination of Southern people more than any musical tradition ever has.

Southern communities welcomed singing school teachers with enthusiasm in the early to middle 1900s, and the people embraced the gospel singing style. Some songs were liked, others disliked; some were transmitted orally, some through written matter, but the musical style as a whole was clearly accepted. By the 1940s, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of communities throughout the South could boast of having their own gospel music singers, teachers, and composers. The musical style gave Southern people a broad outlet for creative expression to which they had not previously had access. Singers ranging from those who could barely carry a tune to those who were able to compose songs in intricate harmonies could all find places to express themselves.

The preoccupation of some early ballad and folksong scholars for the old and anonymous ~~caused~~ the dynamics of the gospel music traditions to be overlooked. The fact that written music and organized schools were involved overshadowed the fact that the music probably represented "the spirit of the mountains" more completely than any other tradition. The words reflected their religious and social attitudes, and the melodies, simple and straightforward with basic four-part harmonies, suited their musical aesthetics.

The tradition of newness was an important element in the gospel singing movement, but the new was built onto the old. Like a traditional basketmaker who takes new materials and fashions them into old



patterns, or like the Yugoslavian epic singer who improvises his narratives using established phrases and patterns, so did the gospel song composers, especially before World War II, set their ideas within long-standing musical and lyric traditions. Some composers could literally compose gospel songs spontaneously.<sup>4</sup>

The strict definitions of folk music of early folk music scholars have been loosened in recent decades as research into the songs of groups such as miners, cowboys, and factory workers has proven useful in understanding the traditions of the groups. These studies have suggested that the oldest songs in a community are not necessarily the ones the community finds most meaningful. The most meaningful music traditions are often dynamic, vital, and characterized by slow but constant change because of their tendency to attract the energies of the most musically creative people in a community. Southern gospel music as a whole has, for many decades, remained traditional and local but at the same time vital and changeable.

Today, folk music scholars generally agree that at least some Southern gospel singing styles represent long-standing indigenous traditions but few of these scholars have chosen to conduct research into the nature of white gospel music (notable exceptions are Charles Wolfe, Bill Malone, and Harlan Daniel).<sup>5</sup> The result is that students

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<sup>4</sup>George Pullen Jackson, White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1965), pp. 376-377.

<sup>5</sup>See Charles K. Wolfe, Kentucky Country: Folk and Country Music of Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982); Bill C. Malone, Southern Music/American Music (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979); Harlan Daniel, unpublished materials in Charles Wolfe's personal library, Middle Tennessee State University.

interested in white gospel music are referred to materials such as the writings of George Pullen Jackson, who concentrated his research on songs from nineteenth century tunebooks, or to publications on the urban evangelical movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which had little affect on rural Southern traditions. Broad research into the growth of singing conventions, the development of rural gospel singing events, and the transfer of gospel singing styles has yet to be conducted by folk music scholars, and until such research can be conducted students of Southern white gospel music should be aware of the limitations of available scholarship.

Also influential in perpetuating a negative image of twentieth century gospel music have been a small contingent of singers connected with groups who sing from nineteenth century tunebooks such as The Sacred Harp, The Southern Harmony, and The Christian Harmony. In some areas, especially in the deep South, singings where one of these tunebooks are used exclusively have continued to exist to the present day. Most often, rural singers active in the tunebook, or "old-book," conventions are also active in new gospel songbook conventions. In recent decades, however, some singing enthusiasts and scholars have dismissed twentieth century gospel music as being the inferior offspring of a once noble tradition.

I am not arguing here that the old modal tunes of the tunebooks, or for that matter the old ballads and folksongs, should be pushed aside and forgotten, but I am arguing that scholarly articles and the academic setting in general are not appropriate places for scholars, especially folklorists, to judge a group's taste in beauty. Gospel music has, however, been subjected to such misplaced judgements.



George Pullen Jackson, the major leader in bringing Southern religious music to the attention of folk music scholars, did not think highly of twentieth century gospel music. During the twenties and thirties, he proposed and aggressively argued that many Southern religious songs were traditional. By using old tunebooks, he was able to show that many songs were drawn from unknown antiquity and were subjected to much variation. Charles Seeger describes Jackson's approach as follows:

His criterion in the area is: that which bears closest relation to the ballad tune is what has value in the thoroughly messed-up and often depraved banality of Protestant Church music. He is on solid ground.<sup>6</sup>

In the course of his research, Jackson developed a strong personal interest in attending old-book singing conventions and became a major proponent in a movement to perpetuate and revitalize these conventions. Like many ballad collectors, Jackson felt a calling to convince rural people to preserve the old songs. He spoke of "the gospel blight" in connection with twentieth century gospel music.<sup>7</sup> (He did, however, conduct an enormous amount of valuable research into the more current gospel music institutions, evidently to give a more complete history of shape-note music.)

Jackson was presenting new ideas to folk music scholars in the twenties and thirties, and his careful attempt to divide old religious songs from new religious songs is understandable in light

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<sup>6</sup>Charles Seeger, *Forward to Another Sheaf of White Spirituals*, by George Pullen Jackson (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1952), p. viii.

<sup>7</sup>Jackson, *White Spirituals*, p. 364.

of the folk music theories that surrounded him, but today such a division is not so easily justified. Southern religious music has always been changing. It has had a "chameleon nature," to borrow Charles Wolfe's term,<sup>8</sup> and has adapted itself to new styles. Even the early tunebooks were not collections of old classics but of the most popular religious songs, old and new. Often, a compiler of one of these song collections defended the existence of his new tunebook by pointing out the inclusion of songs never before published.

Attitudes continue to exist, however, that the religious songs of the early tunebooks are somehow more authentic, more true, more unadulterated, and more worthy than are the gospel songs of the twentieth century. One example of this attitude is expressed by Dorothy Horn in "The New Harp of Columbia and Its music in the Singing School Tradition," which serves as an introduction to a 1978 facsimile edition of the 1919 revision of The New Harp of Columbia. She writes:

Although dates may vary for the last singing school in different parts of east Tennessee, today the Old Harp singings are all that remain of an honorable tradition. Indeed, this is true throughout the South.

She adds in a footnote:

I have heard that singing schools using the Stamps-Baxter books are still occasionally held. Since these books are largely devoted to gospel music of the foot-stamping variety, such singing schools can only be considered an off-shoot of the older tradition.<sup>9</sup>

Horn implies that Stamps-Baxter songbooks and the singing schools

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<sup>8</sup>Charles Wolfe, 17-17-84, unrecorded discussion.

<sup>9</sup>Dorothy D. Horn, "The New Harp of Columbia and Its Music in the Singing School Tradition," Introduction to The New Harp of Columbia, by M. L. Swan (facsimile ed., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), p. viii.



that have used them are not related, or academically relevant, to the nineteenth century singing school traditions.

In reality, the new-song conventions of the twentieth century are in several ways more closely related to the singings of the mid-1800s than are the current old-book conventions. For example, many of the contemporary old-book conventions have become rather secularized and are being organized in colleges, conferences, parties, and other centers away from the rural churches while the new-book conventions, like the nineteenth century conventions, have remained closely connected to the fundamentalist religious institutions that have historically nurtured the growth of popular religious music. Also, an overwhelming desire to preserve and perpetuate a romantic past has pervaded many of the contemporary old-book conventions, while an interest in new ideas and in improving the music has generally prevailed in both the conventions of the 1800s and the more contemporary new-book conventions. Even the argument that the musical and lyric styles of the early tunebooks are drastically different from those of the contemporary gospel songbooks is being questioned as scholars such as David H. Stanley point out the many similarities.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, the new-book conventions and the old-book conventions of today are both, in their own ways, "authentic" off-spring of the nineteenth century Southern tunebook singings.

Singing school teachers represent the cream of the crop within a continuing musical tradition that can certainly be called noble. It

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<sup>10</sup>David H. Stanley, "The Gospel-Singing Convention in South Georgia," Journal of American Folklore 95 (1982):13-19.

has been vital in southcentral Kentucky since the early 1800s and has stood through many cultural changes and technological developments. Singing schools were enthusiastically welcomed and endorsed in the rural communities in the region until the last couple of decades, and they are still supported by a small number of rural church congregations. Departing from the rules of classical music, the bearers of the gospel music traditions, especially the teachers, have maintained their own rules; chords should seldom be dissonant, for example, and words sung should be pronounced as they are spoken. Singing school teachers are not musically backward or behind the times; they simply know what they like, they know what their students like, and they are aware of the musical traditions they teach. They deserve the respect and attention of folk music scholars because they use time-honored Southern-born methods and techniques to attain their unpretentious goal of improving congregational singing in rural fundamentalist churches.



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